

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound



"YOU CAN FIND YOURSELF
IN EXTREME SITUATIONS"

ISABELLE HUPPERT

CINEMA'S MOST FEARLESS ACTOR ON HER LIFE AND CAREER

PLUS

- PEDRO ALMODOVAR ON 'JULIETA' ● REMEMBERING ABBAS KIAROSTAMI ● 'THE SHALLOWS'
- MIA HANSEN-LØVE'S 'THINGS TO COME' ● INGRID BERGMAN'S EARLY YEARS ● TODD SOLONDZ

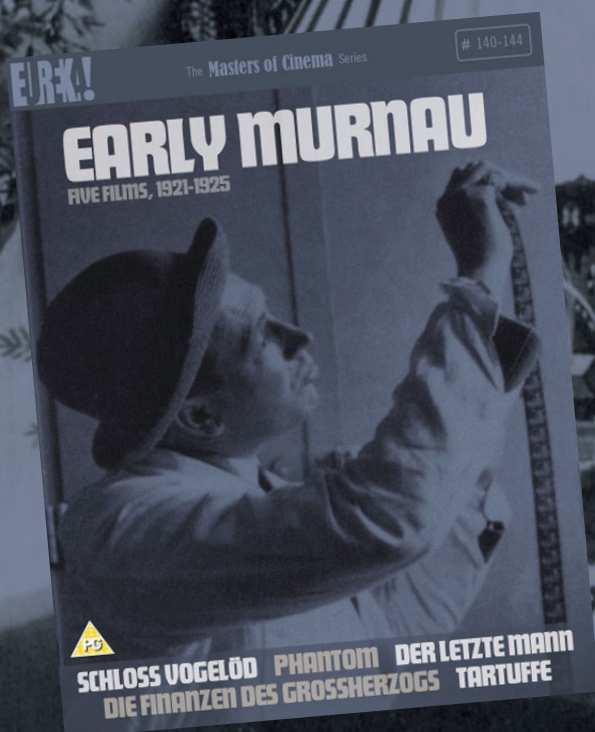
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Photograph of Isabelle Huppert from CS Media/Contour by Getty Images. Retouched by Dawkins Colour.

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film of the month



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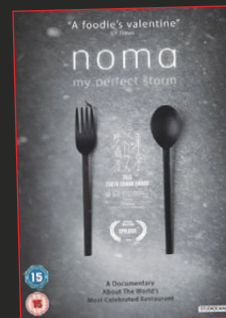
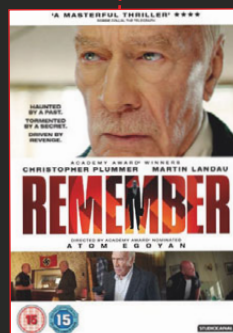
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Editorial Nick James



THE BOURNE OBSOLESCENCE

Recently I hosted a discussion with Indian director Shekhar Kapur (*Bandit Queen*, *Elizabeth: the Golden Age*) for the London Indian Film Festival, at which he told me he'd more or less given up on Hollywood and was sure the current blockbuster cinema would eventually collapse. "You go there and they tell you they're not interested in drama," he said. "And I ask, 'What are you interested in?' And they can't tell you." His vision of Hollywood's malfunction is based on creative bankruptcy, but he arrived at it in a roundabout way. He told me he was worried that Bollywood has priced itself out of its largest market – the ordinary Indian citizen – and that the multiplexes in India are showing more Hollywood films and fewer Bollywood titles. But he saw that not as a success for Tinseltown but as a symptom of its dependence on the global market. His view is that the Hollywood blockbuster will last only until China starts making enough of its own mega-budget films.

Cut to: A press screening of *Jason Bourne*. I was enjoying the film (I love car chases and whip pans) but I felt the franchise had reached its *reductio ad absurdum*. Matt Damon as Bourne has become the purest cipher of endured pain and self-defence. There has always been a healthy dose of moral as well as political and physical chaos in the Bourne films – it reached a kind of nihilistic and balletic purity in *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007) – but *Jason Bourne* evinces an emptier sort of purism. It's about the speed of people and information competing with each other and not letting up, because it's a dance of death. 'Information kills' is a relevant message, but otherwise it's Bourne with very little subtext, positioned as superhero competition – and this all-surface edition comes from the franchise that had once provided all those lovely textural ideas for the James Bond reboot.

In her recent article 'Words are losing their power', the *Guardian's* Catherine Shoard notes of Matt Damon that, "In the [*Jason Bourne*] trailer, he delivers eight economical lines – which, it has emerged, is about a third of his total in the entire film." She then tots up the paucity of lines spoken in *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*, *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Only God Forgives*, tells us that later this year China will overtake the US as the biggest box-office territory, and finally confirms Kapur's world view: "In order for movies to turn a profit, not only do they need to conquer east Asia, but South America and all of Europe too." *Ergo*, the less dialogue the better.

Cut to: A book called *The Parisian Avant Garde in the Age of Cinema, 1900-1923* (which I review on page 105). Jennifer Wild describes a time not unlike our own in which such questions as where films were watched, what kind of screen was used, how long the films lasted and how much attention we gave them were all in flux. The cinema then was still inventing the movie star and it had the craze factor now enjoyed by something



What attracts the camera's attention is anything moving through the air at high speed – bullets, motorcycles, cars, humans: brains, flesh and bone

like Pokémon Go. Wild's book is set against what she calls 'cinematic verticality' – basically, the way we've watched feature films, transfixed in cinemas, since the mid-1920s – and prefers 'cinematic horizontality', which means a cinema that roamed more broadly as a phenomenon that affected culture through posters, publications and alternative projection methods. Such an approach makes all the more sense in terms of our present day multi-screen, multi-platform environment.

For Wild, this horizontality is in opposition to what she sees as an industrial and institutional effort in France during World War I to make cinema respectable, to make it conform as far as possible to the established practice of going to a theatre to hear actors declaim. The avant-garde artists she's interested in (the Dadaists in particular) detested this, instead celebrating what Wild calls the 'cinema of ballistics' – disreputable American crime films with bullets flying, the action-oriented French serials of Louis Feuillade and the physical low-life comedy of Charlie Chaplin. In fact, the term is better applied to *Jason Bourne*, in which what attracts the camera's attention is anything moving through the air at high speed – bullets, motorcycles, cars, electronic surveillance maps, humans: brains, flesh and bone.

In worrying about the absence of drama in films like *Jason Bourne*, are Kapur, Shoard and myself looking in the wrong place? Should we accept, as Kapur has in his working life, that screened dialogue-driven drama is increasingly migrating to television? Or is the present day 'cinema of ballistics' reaching a redundancy? Does the popular backlash against globalisation embodied in such symptoms as the UK's Brexit vote presage an end to globalised notions of big films that work for everyone, no matter what their language? I don't know the answer, but I know it's the key question. ☹

IN THE FRAME

HELL AND HIGH SLAUGHTER

From *The Battle of the Somme* to *Atonement*, a new exhibition offers a generous array of film clips to explore 100 years of war movies

By Philip Kemp

The exhibition at London's Imperial War Museum, 'Real to Reel: A Century of War Movies', aptly greets the visitor with excerpts from *The Battle of the Somme* (1916). This, as described by Lawrence Napper in July ('Amid the guns below', *S&S*), must qualify as the first-ever feature-length war documentary, a 74-minute film shot, for the most part, at or near the front while the carnage was still raging. (It screened twice at BFI Southbank in early July, as part of the BFI's ongoing 'WW1 – The View from the Ground' season.) The knowledge that some of the sequences of troops going over the top were reconstructions doesn't lessen the film's impact: there's a harrowing contrast between shots of Tommies cheerily waving at the camera on their way to the front, and the bleak stare, direct into the lens, of a man staggering along a trench under the weight of his wounded – or dead? – comrade's body.

From here we're immediately confronted with Stanley Kubrick's frank quote: "For all its

horror... war is pure drama" – the key, surely, to its perennial attraction as a subject for movie-makers. Kubrick, of course, memorably took on World War 1 (*Paths of Glory*, 1957), Vietnam (*Full Metal Jacket*, 1987), nuclear war (*Dr. Strangelove*, 1963) and an unspecified combat in his early, disowned *Fear and Desire* (1952) – but never, perhaps surprisingly, WWII.

The IWM's exhibition, on the other hand, focuses strongly on WWII. Understandably enough: the 1939-45 combat was seized on by filmmakers at the time and for decades afterwards as a near-inexhaustible resource-bank for everything from bombastic fanfaronades of national pride to outpourings of satire, cynicism and disillusionment. Clips are lavishly provided, complete with headphones, and it's fascinating to see how filmmaking techniques have changed over the years. One screen takes us from grainy official army footage of the D-Day landings through the relatively sober black-and-white 'Scope framing of *The Longest Day* (1962) to Spielberg's wildly ducking, dodging, zip-panning camera in the Omaha Beach sequence of *Saving Private Ryan* (1998).

Many of the clips seem almost inevitable: the blowing up of the bridge in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), Chaplin's Adenoid Hynkel

haranguing his audience in *The Great Dictator* (1940), George C. Scott gung-ho as General 'Buck' Turgidson in *Dr. Strangelove* ("No more than ten to twenty million killed – tops!"), Jack Hawkins agonising over his duty in *The Cruel Sea* (1952), Steve McQueen's doomed bid for freedom on a motorbike in *The Great Escape* (1963), Joe Wright's virtuoso five-minute Dunkirk Beach take in *Atonement* (2007). Others are less expected: Donald Duck being shrink-fitted into his uniform in *Donald Gets Drafted* (1942), or the Ministry of Information's stop-action mocking of storm-troopers in *Hoch der Lambeth Walk* (1941).

Additional footage adds perspective. A scene from *Carve Her Name with Pride* (1958) is supplemented by a recent interview with Virginia McKenna on her feelings about playing Violette Szabo, the executed Resistance heroine; and Paul Katis, director of Afghan War drama *Kajaki* (2014), musing on why American war films are so different from their UK counterparts, suggests that "we ran out of heroism about 1945". The exhibition is enhanced by a wealth of artefacts, some frivolous: *The Casablanca Cookbook* supposedly allowed its readers to prepare the dishes and drinks served at Rick's Café. (Easier in wartime USA than in ration-straitened Britain, one imagines.) Some are moving: the pocket bible inscribed in Szabo's memory and presented by her colleagues to her young daughter; and a last, loving letter from US Army surgeon Robert Ware to his wife, written on the eve of D-Day and saying how he was sure he'd survive. He was shot dead the moment he set foot on the beach.

Chief disappointment is the narrowness of the exhibition's scope – overwhelmingly Anglo-American, predominantly WWII. There are only a handful of films from Germany (*Das Boot*, *Downfall*), almost nothing from France bar a passing nod to *La Grande Illusion* (1937), nothing at all from Russia, Italy, China or Japan, let alone Africa (*Camp de Thiaroye*, anyone?). The Spanish Civil War doesn't even figure. Casting a wider net could have turned a sound, solid exhibition into something exceptional. Still, just outside the exit by way of send-off there's a director's chair; you can sit in it, take a selfie and picture yourself the new Kubrick. 📷

i 'Real to Reel: A Century of War Movies' runs until 8 January 2017



Duck and cover: Donald Duck gets to grips with army life in *Donald Gets Drafted* (1942)

FrightFest

The UK's premier celebration of screen horror returns to London this August, but will be relocating from Leicester Square to Shepherd's Bush (25-29 August). Highlights include Mateo Gil's Frankenstein tale 'Realive', Anne Biller's 'The Love Witch' (right), demon baby in-utero horror 'Shelley' and DIY zombie thriller 'Here Alone'.



'The Get Down'

Netflix's latest, which premieres on 12 August, sees Baz Luhrmann tell the story of the birth of hip-hop in the Bronx in the 1970s, in 'The Get Down' (right), co-scripted by music writer Nelson George. Meanwhile 'Queen Sugar', Ava DuVernay's TV debut, will screen in the US in September, although there is no news yet on when it will be made available in the UK.



ON OUR
RADAR



'For all its horror... war is pure drama,' said Stanley Kubrick, who made the anti-war classic *Paths of Glory*

Venice Film Festival

The Lido's line-up is looking lively this year (31 August - 10 September): Damien Chazelle's Hollywood-musical homage 'La La Land' opens the festival, playing in competition alongside Pablo Larraín's biopic 'Jackie', in which Natalie Portman plays Jackie Kennedy (right); Ana Lily Amirpour's 'The Bad Batch'; and Terrence Malick's IMAX doc 'Voyage of Time'. Joining them are new films from old hands such as Andrei Konchalovsky, Emir Kusturica, François Ozon and Wim Wenders. Meanwhile the 'Venice Days' sidebar for new talent boasts the debut from actor and comedy writer Alice Lowe, 'Prevenge'.



Soundtrack

Musician Barry Adamson, whose work features on the soundtrack for 'Lost Highway', has curated a season of films with notable soundtracks at HOME, Manchester (running until 31 August). His selection ranges from the jazz wanderings of 'Shadows' (1959, right) to Mica Levi's eerie, discordant score for 'Under the Skin' (2013).



LISTOMANIA ANIMAL ATTACK!

No creature comforts here: as a predatory shark goes on the hunt in *The Shallows* (see page 34), we survey thrillers about bloodthirsty beasts.

- 1 **The Birds** (1963)
Alfred Hitchcock
- 2 **Willard** (1971)
Daniel Mann
- 3 **Jaws** (1975)
Steven Spielberg
- 4 **Long Weekend** (1978)
Colin Eggleston
- 5 **Piranha** (1978)
Joe Dante
- 6 **The Swarm** (1978)
Irwin Allen
- 7 **Cujo** (1983)
Lewis Teague
- 8 **Arachnophobia** (1990)
Frank Marshall
- 9 **The Edge** (1997)
Lee Tamahori
- 10 **The Grey** (2011)
Joe Carnahan



QUOTE OF THE MONTH ROBERT ALDRICH

'A director is a ringmaster, a psychiatrist and a referee.'

Aldrich's 'The Flight of the Phoenix' (1965) is released on Blu-ray by Eureka/Masters of Cinema in August



ALL CISTERNS ARE GO

Disgusting but essential, ubiquitous but rarely screened, the toilet is apt to get bogged down in symbolic importance



By Hannah McGill

In Erica Jong's 1973 novel *Fear of Flying*, the well-travelled protagonist Isadora ponders writing 'The History of the World

Through Toilets'. The coldly ornate British toilet is "the last refuge of colonialism"; "stinking" French toilets issue a confounding contrast with that nation's refined cultural output; and the German toilet with its platform for the observation of excrement is "really the key to the horrors of the Third Reich", since "people who can build toilets like this are capable of anything". The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has pinched and developed Jong's idea, identifying toilet design as illustrative of a Hegelian triad of German conservatism, French revolutionary radicalism and English liberalism. Each design, says Žižek, "involves a certain ideological perception of how the subject should relate to excrement".

Uses of toilets in cinema tend to present a sort of dare to the audience, or to assert the filmmakers' own exemplary broadmindedness. The flush whereby Marion disposes of her illicit calculations in *Psycho* (1960) pre-empts the swirling water that will soon bear away her lifeblood, and indicates her inexorable downward trajectory towards the swamp where her body will end up; but it also served to test the audience's mettle for shocks to come, since toilets were still taboo enough that one had never been flushed in an American film before.

If sensibilities have hardened considerably since, the juxtaposition of female characters with toilet facilities can still be a harbinger of shocks to come. In *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), the sight of Alice (Nicole Kidman) sitting on the toilet as her husband Bill (Tom Cruise) examines himself



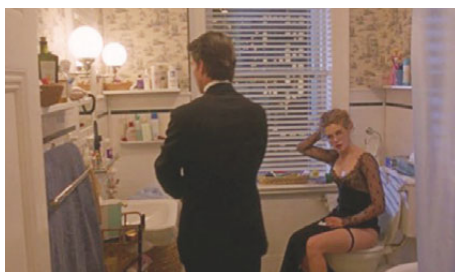
Going round the bend: Ewan McGregor as Renton in Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* (1995)

in the mirror next to her reveals a marriage in which erotic mystique has been displaced by franker physical intimacy, but also heralds a story in which the proximity of human sexuality to human baseness will be a central preoccupation. A more graphic scene in *Maps to the Stars* (2014), featuring Julianne Moore, is characteristic of the film's preoccupation with the rankness bubbling beneath Hollywood's thin veneer of glamour, and also spells out the inescapable physical and moral grossness of a character obsessed with trying to cleanse, cure and perfect herself. In *Bridesmaids* (2011), meanwhile, the physical degradation of the female characters arguably serves as much to reassure as to unsettle the audience. Gross-out

The instinct to giggle prompted by toilets and the business done therein can also defuse the horror in a situation

being standard in mainstream American comedy, *Bridesmaids'* yuckiest scene, which is prompted by a sudden bout of food poisoning – "It's coming out of me like lava," Melissa McCarthy's Megan groans, propping herself over the sink while her friend vomits in the toilet – is also a statement to the effect that the film is not going to skimp on scatology just because it's female-led.

Bathrooms, and toilets in particular, represent the negotiation between our public and private selves. They provide sites for illicit activity – sex, drug use, weeping and secretive drinking – as well as excretion; they know the worst of us. Richard Loncraine's *Richard III* (1995) sees the titular king commence his famous opening speech in front of a fawning audience, but continue it – as it shifts from public soundbites to darker and more inward observations on his own deformity and villainy – over a urinal. In Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (1974), a pristine hotel toilet belches up blood: human misdeeds cannot be sanitised away, nor memory



Eyes Wide Shut (1999)



The Phantom of Liberty (1974)



'The sink's a goner': Wendi McLendon-Covey and Melissa McCarthy in *Bridesmaids* (2011)

of them erased. This pays homage to Hitchcock, and is itself referenced in the Wachowskis' *Bound* (1996), in which a toilet bowl serves simultaneously as a torture implement and a communication device transmitting the resulting sounds to the neighbouring apartment.

The instinct to giggle prompted by toilets and the business done therein can also defuse the horror in a situation. In *Jurassic Park* (1992), the grisliness of the first death of a named character is lent a touch of levity by the fact that it happens to an unsympathetic character while he's hiding in a toilet. That this sequence is played as dark comedy is a tonal signal: though carnage may ensue, we're still watching a family blockbuster, and death will be kept at arm's length. In *Pulp Fiction* (1994), Vincent Vega's death is prompted by the flushing of a toilet; this maintains a pattern in the film of significant occurrences taking place in bathrooms, but also lightens with absurdity the demise of a central character.

Luis Buñuel, in *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974), portrays respectable dinner guests who sit round a table on toilets, but disappear to eat in privacy. The suggestion is that our privileging of one bodily function over another is arbitrary – a matter of ritual alone. Yet our aversion to our dirt is not merely a matter of convention: it is an animal instinct that serves to protect us from what might contaminate us. Hence the impact of the exploding toilet in *La Grande Bouffe* (1973), in which moral corruption becomes a literal coating of shit; and of the scene in *Trainspotting* (1995) in which Renton (Ewan McGregor) submerges himself in the “worst toilet in Scotland” to retrieve morphine suppositories he's lost to a fit of diarrhoea. This sequence shows the extent of Renton's rejection of dinner party mores, but also the foulness and danger of the life he's chosen. In *Trainspotting's* nihilistic anti-value system, self-destructive hedonism and capitalist productivity are both contaminating: one to the body, one to the spirit. Whichever he chooses, and wherever he might find himself on Zizek's proposed triad of excremental attitudes, Renton will remain part of what Tyler Durden in *Fight Club* (1999) calls “the all-singing, all-dancing crap of the world”. 🐾



Jurassic Park (1992)



Psycho (1960)

THE FIVE KEY...

DOG FILMS

As Todd Solondz's *Wiener-Dog* hits UK cinemas, we look at other films that have used stories about dogs to think about humans

By Robert Hanks

In the movies as in life, dogs are our shadows, reflecting our urges, good and bad. Often they have been exemplars of unselfish, unswerving loyalty, parked by gravesides, journeying miles across mountains and deep rivers, or just curled up at their owners' feet. But sometimes, too, they have represented the brutal side of human nature – both as victims of cruelty and as its agents. And at other times they are there as emblems of human shallowness, misshapen inbred heads poking out of handbags. But the best dog films show how complicated the animals are, how talented they can be at expressing and even faking emotion – in this, too, they turn out to be just like us.



2 The Awful Truth (1937)

Skippy the wire fox terrier may have been the most gifted dog actor in Hollywood history, showing off his comic timing in a series of 30s screwball hits, including *The Thin Man* (1934) and several sequels, and *Bringing Up Baby* (1938). As Mr Smith, subject of a custody dispute between Cary Grant and Irene Dunne in Leo McCarey's uptown divorce comedy – his hat-retrieval skills provide a highlight.



4 White Dog (1982)

When a young actress discovers that the injured dog she has rescued is a ‘white dog’, trained to kill black men, she seeks out a dog-trainer to deprogramme him. Samuel Fuller's adaptation of Romain Gary's novel compounds schlock and outraged moral enquiry – about race and about the ways that the darkest human impulses are expressed in our relationships with animals, especially man's supposed best friend.



1 A Dog's Life (1918)

Charlie Chaplin's first film for his own production company has the little tramp allying with Scraps, “a thoroughbred mongrel”, against policemen, employers and a pack of bigger mutts. Dogs often hang around in the background of early films, and Chaplin had featured one in *The Champion* (1915), but Scraps's prominence heralds a new importance for dogs in film – next came the heroic Rin Tin Tin.



3 Lassie Come Home (1943)

The film that launched the longest-running dog franchise, not to mention the careers of Roddy McDowell and Liz Taylor, is an effective tearjerker about dogged devotion: impoverished Yorkshire family sells beloved sheepdog to wealthy duke; carted off to Scotland, Lassie pines, escapes and trots all the way home. Descendants of Pal, the male collie star, were playing versions of Lassie into the 1990s.



5 White God (2014)

Kornél Mundruczó's Cannes prizewinner combines a *Lassie*-style tale of loyalty and determination with a gloomy and somewhat muddled political fable, which takes as its starting-point an anti-mongrel law. But any flaws in the storytelling are dwarfed by the impact of the astonishing CGI-free shots of a pack of more than 200 dogs running amok through the streets of Budapest – like the best dog-food advert ever.

DISAPPEARING ACT

What caused R.W. Paul, the great pioneer of British film, to quit the industry suddenly after a series of inventive, influential early works?

By Ian Christie

Who was the founder of film in Britain? Sixty years ago, the popular answer was William Friese-Greene, especially after Robert Donat had played him in *The Magic Box*, a wonderfully sentimental biopic produced for the Festival of Britain in 1951. According to Ray Allister's fanciful script, Friese-Greene had done it all, managing to show moving pictures to an astonished passing policeman (played by Laurence Olivier in this all-star production) late one night around 1890. But his pioneering achievement had somehow been forgotten, so that he died in poverty in 1921 as the industry that he had helped create blossomed.

Friese-Greene's grave in Highgate Cemetery still proclaims him 'the inventor of cinematography', although a number of other inventors have stronger claims, including Louis Le Prince, who managed to create sequential images in Leeds in 1888. But serious historians of early film have come to focus closer attention on the viewing experience in 1894. Thomas Edison's peep-show Kinetoscope had created a sensation on both sides of the Atlantic, prompting the Lyons industrialist Antoine Lumière to set his sons Louis and Auguste the task of improving on this cumbersome machine, which led to the revolutionary all-in-one Cinématographe. And in London, a young electrical engineer also unexpectedly found himself in the moving picture business.

Robert Paul had been hired to replicate Edison's peep-show machine, quite legally, since the Kinetoscope was not patented outside the United



Pioneer spirit: Robert William Paul

States. He soon joined forces with a photographer, Birt Acres, for what would prove a short-lived partnership that nonetheless produced Britain's first widely seen moving pictures. Indeed their *Rough Sea at Dover* proved to be the biggest success of Edison's own debut on Broadway in April 1896 with his hastily launched Vitagraph projector.

Paul and Acres would split amid acrimonious claims over who had achieved what, and Acres could claim to have opened Britain's first commercial, albeit short-lived, film-only show at Piccadilly Mansions in March 1896.

However, within weeks Paul was supplying a nightly film programme to at least five London music halls, with a residency at the Alhambra in Leicester Square, directly competing with the Lumière Cinématographe show at the nearby Empire. Somehow – and both the motivation and the process remain mysterious – Paul had transformed himself into an astonishingly inventive producer of many kinds of animated photography.

One of these, *The Soldier's Courtship* (1896) was Britain's first real acted film, rediscovered and reconstructed only five years ago by the Italian Cineteca Nazionale, and first shown at the Pordenone silent film festival in 2011. Commissioned by the theatre's manager to spice up the programme, this remarkably confident comedy was shot on the roof of the Alhambra in April 1896 and starred two of its leading dancers, Fred Storey and Julie Seale. When the couple's enthusiastic lovemaking is interrupted by a busybody, they tip her off the park bench and continue. The busybody was played by another Alhambra dancer Ellen Dawn (née Daws), who could look forward to a happier real-life ending, when she became Robert Paul's wife a year later.

Soon the 27-year-old Paul was facing a major career decision. Should he continue to build his instrument business, which had the support of some influential electrical engineers, or should he embrace a new world of screen entertainment, where big money looked set to be made? In the event, he did both. Instrument-making continued to prosper, leading to the launch of a new kind of galvanometer to measure electric currents in 1903, and which remained in mass production for 50 years. A showroom in Leicester Square and even a branch office in New York led to Paul successfully merging his electrical business with Cambridge Scientific Instruments in 1919.

Meanwhile, his film company enjoyed equal, if not more spectacular success, leading to the creation of Britain's first comprehensive studio complex in 1899 on a greenfield site in what is now the London suburb of Muswell Hill. The range of subjects that Paul offered for sale and later rental is extraordinary. His other great success of mid-1896 had been a film of the Prince of Wales's horse Persimmon winning the Derby in June, which played on the following day to wild enthusiasm at the Alhambra. Similar 'topicals' continued to be produced, alongside knockabout comedies, in which policemen were often the butt of violent humour, and the Victorian vogue for spiritualist seances was mercilessly mocked.

Among the surviving films from his earliest, most inventive period is half of the first Dickens adaptation, *Scrooge, or, Marley's Ghost* (1901), which featured impressive apparitions, and printed scene titles that appear to have been a Paul innovation. Another part-survival is one section of the ambitious *Army Life; or, How Soldiers are Made* (1900), a series of 20 films covering every branch of Britain's army that was launched with full War Office backing at the height of the Second Anglo-Boer War in 1900. We know now that two of Paul's brothers served in South Africa, which may have provided a personal motive for his involvement in the war effort at other levels. From one of two cameras he sent



Shadow of a doubt: *The Fatal Hand* (1907) was recently rediscovered by the Italian Cineteca Nazionale

to the Cape came the nearest thing to a filmed scoop, showing a newly captured Boer general; while to compensate for the lack of close-up action detail, he produced reproductions of typical war scenes, with the Muswell Hill golf course standing in for the South African veld.

Paul's commitment to forms of documentary didn't end with the war. One of the exciting new discoveries made by Camille Blot-Wellens in the archive of the Swedish Film Institute is *A Collier's Life* (1904) and the British Film Institute is partnering with it on a restoration of the film, which will soon be available to view on BFI Player. The film took viewers into the Shirebrook Colliery in Derbyshire, then a relatively modern coalmine, with an emphasis on showing what miners actually do. Was it Paul's engineering background that encouraged an emphasis on process? One of the very last of his documentaries to survive covers in remarkable detail the Atlantic whaling industry that was once based in Ireland (*Whaling Afloat and Ashore*, 1908). Up to 1910, cinema programmes could still accommodate a wide variety of actuality and topographical subjects, but increasingly they also needed to offer sensation. Another recent find in the Swedish archive, which shows Paul was keeping up with this demand, is *The Fatal Hand* (1907) – also set to screen on BFI Player now that a copy has been acquired by the BFI. The first image is of a poster offering a reward for recapturing a four-fingered 'homicidal lunatic', on the run from an asylum that's clearly meant to evoke Broadmoor, followed by the stark silhouette of such a hand appearing at an old lady's window. Two murders later, the escapee is finally cornered after a chase through a suburban station and streets, a sequence that shows how influential Paul and his associates were in creating a brand of everyday crime drama that we associate more readily with early American and French filmmaking.

Why then did he abruptly leave the film business, some time during 1909-10? Paul's personal life has remained surprisingly little known, despite the recognised role he played as respected 'father' of the British film industry for nearly 15 years. Responding to an inquiry from Germany in 1932 about the pioneer days, he wrote that he was "averse to personal publicity", which seems to have been no understatement. Apart from a short talk he gave to fellow pioneers in 1936, the only surviving record of Paul's career consists of a handful of impersonal letters, his catalogues of films for sale, and less than a tenth of the films themselves. In the talk, Paul said only that the cost of production made it uneconomic to continue after 1909, and that he had "destroyed my stock of negatives", devoting his energies instead to the electrical instrument business.

There were indeed good business reasons to quit film at this time, as the impact of Edison's patent was devastating the export market, and films increasingly needed to be longer and more elaborate. But could Paul have had a more personal motive? Two apparently unconnected pieces of evidence that have come to light recently point to this possibility. The 1911 British census asked for the first time how many children respondents had, and Paul's answer



In the hot seat: R.W. Paul's *The Soldier's Courtship* (1896) was Britain's first real acted film

The manuscript recounts that a child was accidentally poisoned during the making of a film – substantiating an old rumour

gave the surprising information that he had had three, all born alive but now dead. Discovering this has led to a search for the later two, as it was already known that Robert and Ellen had lost their first-born in 1898. The historian Richard Brown was first to discover a second boy, who died in infancy in 1903. But could a later child have also died before the 1911 census?

At this point, chance intervened in the unravelling of the mystery. A manuscript that reached the BFI anonymously several years ago appears to have been based on the author's close personal knowledge of the Pauls. And although much of what it contains about the film business was undoubtedly plagiarised from familiar sources, several chapters ring true in evoking Robert and Ellen and their personal life. Despite Paul's rather dour appearance in the few known photographs – and none has

so far been identified of Ellen – they appear to have led a convivial social life, which included regular parties at the Café Royal and outings on the Thames. But one paragraph recounts that a child was accidentally poisoned during the making of a film – which substantiates an old rumour about Paul's reason for quitting film that had long seemed improbable.

Surely nothing but such a traumatic experience could have led Paul, who had a strong sense of his own place in early moving picture history, to jettison all the evidence of his pioneering career? No trace has yet been found of the incident that probably drove him to abandon film. But even if it remains elusive, this at last seems to explain why 'Daddy Paul', as he was known to contemporaries, felt he could not carry on in the face of personal tragedy. 

A programme of Paul's 'magic' films, made with the involvement of the special effects and animation pioneer Walter Booth, has been organised by Bill Barnes for this year's Le Giornate del Cinema Muto in Pordenone in October, and will be accompanied by the new discoveries and reconstructions described above

WHAT AND WHERE



Discoveries in neuroscience are changing how we think about the arts, offering a conceptual structure that helps reconfigure film history



By Mark Cousins

"Ma heid's mince"* is what I often say to my editor Timo after a long day cutting, when my brain has stopped working.

The discoveries of neuroscientists, the great explorers of the mince, are changing how we think of the arts. In the 20th century the avant garde were a bunch of non-conformists who changed the form of their art; in the 21st century they are people with enhanced bits of brain. Formalists were antisocial stylists; now they are people with atypical neuron activity. Sentiment was – and often is – considered an excess or weakness in storytelling; now it can be traced to affect-specific areas of the brain.

You can raise an eyebrow at some of this, but how about the following. Studies of the brains of people and monkeys have suggested that they use somewhat different streams within the brain's rear visual cortex when they are assessing what something is and where it is. The 'what?' stream, the ventral, tells you that the thing coming at you as you cross the road is a motorbike. The 'where?' stream, the dorsal, which is a bit higher up, tells you where the bike is and how long you have to avoid it.

The dorsal and ventral systems are far from independent, but the distinction reconfigures film history. On one hand we have the ventral

objectivists: Alfred Hitchcock, whose things – the key in *Notorious* (1946), the chignon hair in *Vertigo* (1958), the shower head in *Psycho* (1960) – seem to hypnotise his camera. He lets us stare or glide towards these things, as if we are to reach out and touch them. David Lynch films are also ventral – think of the ear in *Blue Velvet* (1986) and the strange worm-foetus in *Eraserhead* (1976). We don't just glance at them and look away. It's as if we are committing them to memory by letting them burn slowly into our consciousness.

There's a slowness and centrality to the ventral object. In Claire Denis's *Beau travail* (1998), we see Denis Lavant's pulse in a vein in his arm, a tiny detail seldom shown (and hard to film). Denis's movie doesn't whip past that detail, it lingers. In Taiwan, Tsai Ming-liang is the ventral modern master of lingering. His shots stay in rooms longer than most, immobile, staring at people or water. They're not continually assessing the moving position of objects, because those objects are not moving much. Ditto, in a way, the things in Ozu Yasujiro's ventral movie world. Kettles just sit there and boil; a jug is filmed without movement; and at the end of *Late Spring* (1949), a man simply peels an apple. In the films of Terence Davies, the camera will slowly be drawn to a photo on a wall, like a tractor beam, or it will gaze at a carpet or slowly arrive at a face. In most of the movies of Robert Bresson, it's the object that matters – a wallet to be pickpocketed, for example, or blank faces. Bresson saw his actors as objects.

Studies of brains suggest that they use different streams within the rear visual cortex to assess what something is and where it is

Compare this type of film with dorsal seeing, where the objects are less reified, and it's their movement which excites. Perhaps the greatest dorsal filmmaker is Hong Kong's Tsui Hark. Many of his scenes are vortices in which his cameras, actors and sets (curtains, doors, etc) swirl around each other. Their whatness is less important than their whereness. His is an art of relative velocity. Ditto John Woo, in whose films to stop is to fail or disappear. Paul Greengrass's Bourne films are dorsal too, in that they are a scurried montage of vectors, the tripod often abandoned. In the way that the camera keeps swooping through space, and the films cut on the move, the Orson Welles of *Othello* (1952) and *Chimes at Midnight* (1966) is dorsal. And Gareth Evans's *The Raid* (2012) is one of the most dorsal films ever made.

This isn't just to separate action movies from the rest. The films of John Ford, Kira Muratova and George Cukor aren't action/dorsal cinema, but neither are they as object-focused as pure ventral filmmaking. And, more intriguingly, neuroscience has found that the ventral and dorsal streams differ in how they relate to other things that are strongly relevant to cinema. The where/dorsal is fast, as you'd expect of something so integral to our fight or flight mechanisms. It is stored for a shorter time in that it is constantly overwritten, and so is less available to memory. Also it is relatively unconscious. The what/ventral stream is slower, stores for longer, and so is more memorised, and is higher up in consciousness. Neuroscience is confirming what Hitchcock and John Woo instinctively knew – that we'd remember Kim Novak's chignon, and that our panic buttons are pressed by multiply moving cameras. 📍

* "My head is mincemeat", if you don't understand Scots.

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DEVELOPMENT TALE

BROTHERHOOD



Unstoppable: Noel Clarke, former golden boy of British urban films, is returning to the scene of his successes

The experience of fatherhood encouraged Noel Clarke to make the third film in a series that made him famous – and he's not stopping there

By Charles Gant

Back in the summer of 2008, when Noel Clarke's directorial debut *Adulthood* surprised everyone with its £3.35 million take at UK cinemas, there was plenty of pressure on the actor-turned-filmmaker to deliver more of the same. Having expanded his role from screenwriter and supporting actor in 2006's *Kidulthood*, Clarke was celebrated as the golden boy of the British urban genre. Surely he'd continue to ride that wave?

"After the success of *Adulthood*, I was offered quite a good amount of money to do a third film, which probably would have my mortgage paid off by now," recalls Clarke. "But the thought of doing another one back then wasn't something I was interested in, because I didn't have anything to say."

Instead, having scooped the BAFTA Rising Star Award in February 2009, Clarke quickly set about applying his ear for the argot of British youth to a variety of other genres, building a diverse slate at his own production company Unstoppable Entertainment. He wrote, directed and produced the glossy transatlantic thriller *4.3.2.1* (2010), and then in 2012 variously served

as writer and/or producer on athletics drama *Fast Girls*, sci-fi-tinged confined-space thriller *Storage 24* and wedding comedy *The Knot*.

None performed very impressively at the UK box office, but Clarke returned to directing with 2014's *The Anomaly*, an ambitious – if convoluted and under-achieved – sci-fi action film that earned him another writer and producer credit.

"It was all about trying to do different genres," Clarke remembers of this period. "I didn't want to do the same type of film. I wanted to give this country a bit of ambition, and do films that were slightly different. I was heavily influenced by American indies growing up. I didn't see anything [from the UK] that related to me. I was watching *Boyz n the Hood*, the Kevin Smith films, Tarantino and [Mexican films] *Amores perros*, *Y tu mamá también*. I wanted to make that type of film here. Little did I know that people didn't want to see that type of film here – although *4.3.2.1* actually did quite well, and quite well internationally."

Meanwhile, the British urban genre, in which Clarke had made his name, was being quietly destroyed. The west London-based Revolver Entertainment, which had released *Kidulthood* but lost out on *Adulthood*, was quick to occupy the space, releasing a slew of titles – including *Shank* (2010), *Sket* (2011) and *Offender* (2012) – made through its in-house production company Gunslinger. "They killed it," says Clarke of Revolver, which

went into administration in 2013. "They kept making films cheaply, just trying to exploit the genre for money. And so, when you do that, eventually the audience gets bored."

Meanwhile, Revolver and Clarke were set on a collision course when the company made and distributed *Anuvahood* (2011), a comic take on the urban genre, starring, directed and co-written by *Kidulthood* and *Adulthood* actor Adam Deacon. The obvious conciliatory paths out of this dispute – giving the film a title that did not include the suffix 'hood', involving Clarke in the production – were not taken. (Deacon was convicted of harassment without violence against Clarke in July 2015, having waged a two-year campaign of abuse on social media. The court heard that Deacon had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder.)

Today, Clarke has absolutely no interest in reopening those wounds ("The last thing I need, for my family, is to have that happening all over again"), but it's fair to say that the mere existence of *Anuvahood* probably to some degree tarnished the 'hood' brand for a while.

That's pertinent because Clarke is, after all,

I've always wanted to be ambitious. Why can't we do 'District 9' here? Why can't we do 'Inception'?

returning to the urban genre with belated sequel *Brotherhood*, which picks up on the story of Sam Peel a decade after the events of *Adulthood*. “When *Adulthood* was released on June 20 2008, my oldest son was three-and-a-half weeks old,” he explains. “Talking to you now, he’s eight, and I’ve got three boys, and I see things differently and I react differently. It started me thinking, ‘What if Sam had a child?’, and that’s where it came from.” (As for *Brotherhood*’s title, Clarke concedes that the options that more accurately reflect the protagonist’s progression were rejected on creative and commercial grounds. “It could be called *Parenthood*, *Fatherhood* or *Familyhood*, but those are all terrible names for this film.”)

Since the demise of the UK Film Council, which backed *Adulthood*, Clarke has not had much luck attracting investment from any of the three main cultural pots of money that support independent film in this country – “Film 4 have never seen me for anything. The BFI, I’ve never received anything from them, either for productions or as a grant for the company. And BBC Films have never worked with me either. They’ve met me numerous times, but it never came to fruition.” Which means that he’s always had to depend on the commercial marketplace for backing. Inevitably, there has been scepticism from UK distributors and financiers about a return to this genre, although Clarke has been able to point to, not just very robust DVD sales for both *Kidulthood* and *Adulthood*, but also healthy ratings whenever they pop up on TV.

“It wasn’t easy to secure financing,” he says, “but it wasn’t as difficult as it might be for other people. The difference is that we were the original – us and *Bullet Boy* – and we had the brand.” Maggie Monteith – one of *Brotherhood*’s lead producers alongside Unstoppable’s Clarke, Jason Maza and Gina Powell – was able to deliver a chunk of equity financing, meaning that the film could be fully financed with only UK rights pre-sold (to Lionsgate).

We will soon learn whether *Brotherhood* will achieve Clarke’s ambition of successfully reviving the ‘hood brand, appealing to the original generation that embraced the earlier films, while finding a new younger audience that has never been served with a British urban film. Meanwhile, Clarke takes pride in *Brotherhood*’s selection for the Toronto Film Festival – validation that has not always been easily found on home turf.

“I loved *The Selfish Giant*, I loved *Red Road*. I love all that stuff. That’s what makes our films unique,” he says. “At the same time, I’ve always wanted to be [commercially] ambitious. Why can’t we do *District 9* here? Why can’t we do *Inception*?” And while Unstoppable doesn’t make announcements until films are fully financed, Clarke insists that his company will continue to live up to its boldly conceived name. “By having successes and having failures, I’ve learned so much, I’ve got a business partner [in actor-producer Jason Maza] who’s learned as much as me. I think people will be surprised very soon. We’re working very hard, and things are happening. The hard work is beginning to pay off.”



Brotherhood is released in UK cinemas on 29 August and is reviewed on page 72

THE NUMBERS EMBRACE OF THE SERPENT

By Charles Gant

At the 2015 Cannes Film Festival, the likes of *Dheepan*, *Son of Saul*, *The Assassin*, *Carol*, *The Lobster*, *Macbeth* and *Youth* dominated much of the conversation in the Official Competition, and *Rams*, *Mustang*, *Amy*, *Love* and *Green Room* found plenty of attention in parallel sidebars. But despite winning the top prize in the Directors’ Fortnight, by the end of the festival the little-heralded Colombian film *Embrace of the Serpent* still didn’t have a UK distributor.

That remained the case in October last year, when Tom Abell and Kahloon Loke – who run niche UK distributor Peccadillo – saw *Ciro Guerra*’s film via a viewing link. “It was just one of those gut reactions that we both really liked it and wanted to do it,” Abell says. Sales agent Films Boutique was confident of a foreign-language Oscar nomination, and had two other UK distributors interested, but none with deep pockets. Peccadillo, which already had a relationship with the company through distributing Ira Sachs’s *Keep the Lights On* (2012) and Mexican film *The Golden Dream* (2013), was ultimately able to prevail.

The film is a black-and-white drama about an American botanist in 1940 retracing the 1909 steps of a German ethnographer in the Amazon jungle: its very peculiarity could be seen as either help or hindrance to reaching an audience. “At that point, we thought that this could be really, really successful or it could be a complete disaster,” Abell says. “But we felt that if we could get it out there and get that word of mouth going on it, it could really work.”

Luckily, the BFI’s Distribution Fund agreed, investing £67,000 in the UK release, which it wanted to go towards helping the film reach younger audiences. Peccadillo cut a new, faster-paced 30-second spot, and won impressive click-through to the film’s ticketing page from ads placed on Vice and Instagram. Peccadillo was persuaded to try a new ad strategy called programmatic media buying, which, Abell says, “feeds the ad to a variety of



Amazon prime: *Embrace of the Serpent*

websites and then automatically places more with the ones that are being responsive”. He adds, “It really did work. And the organic reach took us all by surprise – we’ve never had so many likes on a single-film Facebook page.”

Embrace of the Serpent was released in mid-June, initially on 21 prints, delivering a debut gross of £31,400 plus previews of £10,000. The film held well, and after seven weeks had reached £231,000 – a record for Peccadillo, beating previous biggest hit *Weekend*, and an impressive 7.4 times the opening weekend. Curzon Bloomsbury emerged as the hero venue, holding the film on all showtimes for seven straight weeks, and delivering £46,000, 20 per cent of the total.

Embrace of the Serpent did achieve the anticipated Oscar nomination, but Peccadillo was always realistic about the likely impact, and this was borne out by exit polling done by the BFI Distribution Fund. “If it had won, maybe it would have been helpful,” says Abell, “but we were certain that *Son of Saul* was going to win instead. It was nice to have it on our poster, but most of the people polled were not aware that it had been an Oscar-nominated film, or for that matter that it had been in the London Film Festival or Cannes.”

SOUTH AMERICAN CINEMA AT THE UK/IRELAND BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
The Motorcycle Diaries	2004	£2,711,477
City of God	2003	£2,372,951
The Secret in Their Eyes	2010	£776,655
Wild Tales	2015	£728,057
Maria Full of Grace	2005	£696,122
Central Station	1999	£678,663
Bombón: El Perro	2005	£446,913
Nine Queens	2002	£410,973
No	2013	£345,571
Embrace of the Serpent	2016	£230,576*

*gross at press time



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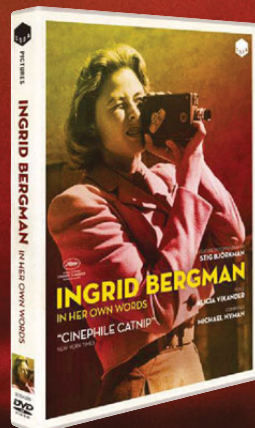


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IL CINEMA RITROVATO

UNIVERSAL AFFIRMATIVE

A focus on Universal Pictures in the early 30s was a particular joy at this year's festival of archive film in Bologna

By James Bell

"The son also rises" was the joke heard around Hollywood boardrooms in April 1928, greeting the news that Universal Pictures founder Carl Laemmle had handed the reins of his company to his son, Carl Laemmle Jr, then all of 21 years old. Many dismissed it as Laemmle senior's latest act of nepotistic folly. But 'Junior' would prove to be a sophisticated and daring producer, and a fascinating programme at this year's Il Cinema Ritrovato festival (June 28 – July 2) focused on the lesser known titles made under his watch, which burned brightly if briefly until it came to an ignominious end in 1936.

At the time Laemmle Jr took over, Universal was pumping out low-cost B features, and he immediately set about cutting the production slate to produce fewer but higher-prestige pictures. One such was 1930's musical revue *King of Jazz*, a two-strip Technicolor extravaganza made to rival Paramount's *Paramount on Parade*, and for decades viewable only in incomplete versions. The superb restoration shown in Bologna used the film's soundtrack negative as a guide, as the original camera negative had been cut. Additional footage was spliced in from other prints and, where footage no longer exists at all, stills accompanied the soundtrack. Inevitably, in a film with such an array of numbers, some fall flat, but it's a riot of colour and design and occasionally sublime (check out Jeanie Lang's rag-doll dancing in the 'My Ragamuffin Romeo' routine, which can be found online).

King of Jazz would prove the last of such costly productions, as the Depression started to bite. The horror pictures worked more than anything to sustain Universal's success, but melodramas, comedies and social problem pictures also found audiences. The Bologna programme made space for several of them, including Edward L. Cahn's tough chain-gang picture *Laughter in Hell* (1933), made in the wake of the *cause célèbre* that was *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang*, and two of James Whale's non-horror films: the brilliantly inventive (if to modern ears misogynistic) melodrama of marital jealousy *The Kiss Before the Mirror* (1933) – shot, like many in the programme, by director of photography Karl Freund in a roving, expressionist style – and the whodunnit black comedy *Remember Last Night?* (1935). Stand-outs, though, were two melodramas of female suffering/fortitude by John Stahl: 1932's *Back Street* and 1933's *Only Yesterday*. In *Back Street* Irene Dunne's love for a married financier leads her to become his life-long mistress, denied true happiness. Told in flashback, *Only Yesterday* rivals Max Ophüls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948) as a tale of love denied, with Margaret Sullavan as a woman who gets



The Bigger picture: Richard Wright and Gloria Madison in *Sangre negra* (1950)

pregnant following a one-night stand during World War 1, only for the father to forget her. Both were reminders that Stahl was one of the very greatest Hollywood directors of melodrama.

One of the joys of watching so many films from one studio is looking out for actors who crop up again and again, and Sullavan was also the star of perhaps the most enjoyable film in the programme, William Wyler's *The Good Fairy* (1935). It was written by a young Preston Sturges, and his wry, daft hilarity was unmistakeable – it should by rights be mentioned among the classics of the screwball era. The irrepressible Sullavan plays Luisa Ginglebuscher (with names like that, I'm sure the Coens must be fans), a girl plucked from an orphanage to become an usher at a Budapest cinema, who has to fend off the attentions of a wealthy industrialist. Cornered in his hotel room, she fibs that she has a husband, picking the name of Herbert Marshall's second-rate lawyer at random from the phone book. Of course, her curiosity means she then has to meet him... A real delight.

'The Good Fairy', written by a young Preston Sturges, should by rights be mentioned among the classics of the screwball era



Sullavan's troubles: *The Good Fairy* (1935)

A number of other – non-Universal – films from the pre-Code early 30s also played, including a restoration of the first screen adaptation of Ben Hecht's *The Front Page* (1930), directed by Lewis Milestone ten years before *His Girl Friday*. If it lacked the inter-gender tension of Howard Hawks's film, it was fascinating to see in an excellent new restoration. Previously circulating prints of the film had been the international release version, but the restoration was of the original American release print, unseen since the 30s and boasting more sophisticated editing and very different dialogue. Another newly restored early talkie was Tay Garnett's rambunctious *Her Man* (1930), a salty 'Frankie and Johnnie' pre-Code tale set mostly in one rough-and-tumble bar full of sailors and floozies, and starring the luminous if mostly forgotten Helen Twelvetrees.

So full is Bologna's programme that there isn't remotely the space to cover it all here. Elsewhere one could take in a range of classic Technicolor productions on original prints, see silent classics like Jean Epstein's *Coeur fidèle* (1923) in a magical open-air carbon projection screening, or catch crowd-pleasers like *The Band Wagon* (1953) in the city's Piazza Maggiore (some of the silent cinema selections are discussed by Bryony Dixon on page 57). But just time to mention a strand that explored "an alternate history" of Argentine cinema. Among its titles was *Sangre negra* (1950), an adaptation of the African-American writer Richard Wright's classic novel *Native Son* whose very existence is something of a miracle: it was directed by a Frenchman, Pierre Chenal, in a Buenos Aires standing in for Chicago, and with a cast of actors comprising in part émigré blacklisted Americans, several of them black. On top of that, Wright himself wrote the film and plays its central character, Bigger Thomas. For a film from 1950 to display such a detailed, sensitive portrayal of black lives felt astonishing, and it was just one of the countless discoveries that make Bologna such a vital festival. 📽

ISABELLE HUPPERT

One of the finest and most adventurous actors of her generation, Isabelle Huppert has proved unforgettable in a series of key roles for the likes of Maurice Pialat, Claude Chabrol, Michael Haneke and Claire Denis since her debut in 1971. Here she discusses her earliest memories of cinema, the art of great performances and what it was like to work with Gérard Depardieu again for the first time in 35 years. **Interview by Nick James**

To call an actor prolific can be seen as a slight that suggests they lack quality control of their work. To say that one actor seems to be regularly cast in a worthy kind of arthouse cinema is to damn with faint praise. To say that they often give cool, understated performances may give inadvertent help to those who want to characterise that actor as someone lacking in feeling. You can find and pile up all these lazy misconceptions around Isabelle Huppert and she will continue to shine regardless because nothing can damage how significant, intelligent, dynamic and passionate an artist she is.

I can think of no other actor to whose work I have been so devotedly paying attention for decades without even trying. If there's such a thing as a cinema that's at the centre of what this magazine is about, then Huppert is its regular lead and star. She's worked with one of the most illustrious list of auteurs one could muster: Assayas, Bellocchio, Blier, Breillat, Chabrol, Chéreau, Cimino, Denis, Diaz, Godard, Haneke, Hansen-Løve, Hartley, Hong Sang-soo, Jacquot, Kurys, Losey, Mendoza, Miller, Ozon, Pialat, Ruiz, David O. Russell, Schroeter, Sturridge, Tavernier, the Taviani brothers, Verhoeven and Wajda – to name just a few.

You can see her as the *grande dame* of world cinema or simply as a leading face of French cinema's open-armed approach to great foreign directors, but the sheer range of her roles and collaborators demonstrates an insatiable curiosity for what's possible. That need for a challenge, that wanderlust spirit, and her refusal to be bland or to rely on easy charm puts her in a tradition that includes the likes of Jeanne Moreau and Ingrid Bergman.

A three-film tribute to Huppert – Guillaume Nicloux's *Valley of Love*, Samuel Benchetrit's *Asphalte* and Joachim Trier's *Louder than Bombs* – brought her to the Morelia International Film Festival in Mexico last November where I met her for the first time and where the interview that follows took place, an onstage career review

conducted in English. I had heard from some that she was an intimidating presence and from others that she was very friendly. In the convivial atmosphere of Morelia, she was nothing but warm and encouraging. Her petite figure does not prepare you for her self-assured presence nor her acuity and versatility in reacting to whatever's demanded of her. You soon realise she can step up to any occasion at the opening of a curtain. As Mia Hansen-Løve says in our interview on page 24, "She has grace and femininity... but also charisma, strength, authority... spirituality even."

ON ISABELLE HUPPERT

'For all of these big actresses [Naomi Watts, Nicole Kidman and Cate Blanchett], the standard is Isabelle Huppert.

She can be everybody. She has the physicality like the girl next door. She's not beautiful but has this plasticity that can express so many things.'

Director Anne Fontaine in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (2014)

'She's one of the most brilliant actors I've ever met. She's so extremely special and is able to avoid any cliché in any situation, always finding a different way of doing things. She comes up with all kinds of extra details that you wouldn't even dream of, that I would never come up with on my own. I didn't have to tell her anything about Michelle [the character Huppert plays in Verhoeven's *Elle*] because it was clear from the first shot that she knew exactly what her character would do and how she would behave in whatever circumstance.'

Director Paul Verhoeven in *Film Comment* (January 2016)

Nick James: What was your first experience with cinema as a child?

Isabelle Huppert: The first film I saw was a very famous Russian film that won the Palme d'Or in Cannes in 1958: *The Cranes Are Flying* by Mikhail Kalatozov. I saw it as a child on television years later, but I remember very well this Russian actress, Tatiana Samoilova. It was a film in black and white that inspired a lot of great camera movements. There are many scenes shot in a forest and it is an amazing film about war. At the end of the film, Tatiana walks on to the platform of a train station where she is going to be reunited with her lover who is returning from war, and who is already dead though she doesn't know it. She is wearing a white gown and she is walking towards the train and other soldiers pass by and then she realises he might not return, that he might be dead. At first she is smiling, but then she gradually begins to cry. And this image keeps circulating in my mind. It is kept very alive because this is the image that showed me that it is possible to laugh and cry at the same time, and this is what cinema is about. At some point an older man tells her, "You have to go, you have to go," and this is something that stayed in my memory forever. That is the first image I had from cinema.

NJ: When you first began to think about becoming an actress, was it cinema first, or theatre first?

IH: That is a very good question. I don't know, I think it was simply acting, acting first. It didn't make any difference to work on a stage or to work on a film. I don't know. My idea was that I could always cross that border between my character and myself, that to act I had to keep being myself, and that this might be a little bit more difficult to do on stage because the idea of a character in theatre is much stronger than a character in a film, even though I have been successful in theatre as well. So it was not so different for me, although they are totally different ways of working. The experience





PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAURENT HUMBERT

of acting in front of people on a stage or of working in front of a camera is completely different, but for me it has been basically the same. Having said that, my career began as a film actress more than as a theatre actress.

NJ: Of your early films, *The Lacemaker* [1977] was very important and personally I tend to think of Maurice Pialat's *Loulou* [1980], which was the first film I saw you in, but you also starred in the very controversial *Heaven's Gate* [1980]. Which of these made you feel like you had arrived?

IH: Certainly *The Lacemaker*, because it is one of these encounters between a role and an actress which happens quite seldom in a lifetime. The role was meant for me to do and it was certainly the most important at the time, because it gave me the possibility, as a very young actress, to express something very interior, and it is not often you find this type of role. Most often you are asked to be pretty or seductive. So that was a great role for me.

NJ: If you could meet yourself as you were then, now, is there any advice you would like to give yourself?

IH: No. I would do the same. But I could do the same now, I could be in *The Lacemaker* now. Well, I did quite good so I wouldn't change a thing. I'm kidding.

NJ: Thinking of *Loulou*, you also worked with Gérard Depardieu back then in *Les Valseuses* [1974] and now you're with him again in *Valley of Love*. What does that feel like after so long?

IH: We don't feel as much as people expect us to

feel. The perception of time from the spectator is totally different from our perceptions. I'm not saying it was not some time ago, but we don't measure the time in the same way. So we feel good, but we feel exactly the same as if we had met two weeks ago. Also because we kept in touch in the meantime, it's not like we had not seen each other at all.

NJ: Do you like to rehearse?

IH: No, I hate it. Cinema is about doing something very spontaneously, and if you rehearse you lose something. Maurice Pialat, who made *Loulou* – a very optimistic guy – he used to say, "It's a shame because you never get to see the best films. The best films are before 'action' and after 'cut'." It was not very encouraging, but I know exactly what he means. That is why he was trying to abolish the rituals between 'action' and 'cut' as much as possible, because the minute you say "action", you try to act and it is all about not acting. To act is already too much. I mean, you don't act in life, you just live, and acting should always be less than more.

NJ: Did Pialat have any particular ways of encouraging you?

IH: Yes, he had this very special way of shooting. For instance in *Loulou*, with Gérard, sometimes

Cinema is about doing something very spontaneously, and if you rehearse you lose something. It is all about not acting

we would be sitting together in a coffee place and we would start to talk and gradually he would roll the camera. We would see the little red light on the camera and we would understand the camera was rolling and gradually we would go into the scene and say the words of the scene, and it was a very exciting feeling to go from real life to gradually going into the story, into 'acting' but without acting.

NJ: Could you give me an example of a director who has a completely different style? And how that excites you in a different way, perhaps?

IH: All great directors have their ways, but the really great ones are the easiest to work with. It is very easy to work with people who have the film exactly in their head and know exactly why they asked you to do the film and they try to create this condition of naturalness, of life, as much as possible.

NJ: And do you get involved in talking to the screenwriters?

IH: Oh no. No, I'm just an actress. And sometimes you can say little things, but the screenplay is just an intermediary tool between the time you decide to do the film and the moment you are doing the film. To do the film is something far away from the script.

Of course I'm not saying that you don't need the script – although I have worked in movies without a script – because the script is important, but it is more a mass of information you get: places, locations, dialogue, situations, characters. Of course you have great scripts and bad scripts, but the movie happens when it



The heat is on: Isabelle Huppert with Gérard Depardieu in *Death Valley* in Guillaume Nicloux's *Valley of Love*



Claude Goretta's *The Lacemaker* (1977)



Guillaume Nicloux's *The Nun* (2013)



Michael Haneke's *The Piano Teacher* (2001)

happens and there is nothing you can anticipate by talking and working on the script.

NJ: You are extremely hard-working, and I wonder how you balance that with life in general? Obviously one loves to do what one loves to do, but maybe you could talk a little bit about the working life on set. What are your favourite things about being on set and what are your least favourite?

IH: My favourite thing is the favourite thing of all actors in the world and it is not easy to describe. It is a feeling when the camera is rolling, it is a nice feeling I can tell you, it is like... I don't know, it is hard to say, but it is certainly that moment. I don't like the moments before much because sometimes it is a very fragile thing to make one little miracle happen after the other. Sometimes you are very nervous, because you want it to happen all the time and you have to repeat take after take... So it is a lot of work and a lot of concentration, but when it happens it is really very nice.

And of course it happens when you really feel the direction of the director. You may have a series of questions in your mind before working on set and these are being answered by the *mise en scène*, by the staging and that is how the dialogue evolves between you and the director. It is never verbal – or it does not have to be. It is really a silent dialogue between you and the camera, between you and the director through the camera movements. Direction and *mise en scène* are all about rhythm and movement, because the movements tell you exactly the distance from where you are being filmed, if it's a close-up or a long-distance shot or a side shot or whatever. It's the way your character is being told. You turn the character around and if the *mise en scène* knows how to receive it, you know exactly how to express the most minimal feeling. That is how you understand who is a great director.

NJ: Speaking of great directors, I was thinking about Claude Chabrol, because several of your great roles have been with him, like *La Cérémonie* [1995] or *Merci pour le chocolat* [2000]. Could you talk a little bit about working with him?

IH: I liked working with Chabrol very much because what I have just tried to describe as an ideal relationship between an actress and a director is exactly what it was between me and him. Plus, he was very funny because he kept saying, "It's not difficult to find the right place for the camera because there is only one place for the camera." He meant by that what I just said. The *mise en scène* is something so sharp, so radical,

that you don't have to look for several places, only one place is right to express that specific feeling for a specific moment in the film. Claude and I talked very little. He would tell me he wanted to do such and such a film with me and he would send me the script and we would just start doing it. He would never say anything to me. I don't think he ever said one word in terms of direction of the character in all these years, in six films.

NJ: And I believe that working on a Chabrol film was always a convivial, relaxed experience...

IH: Yes, it definitely was, but not to the point that some people would think. We would not eat and drink wine all day. At some point we would make movies as well. But it was convivial, because that is the way he was: so smart and so gentle. He was a great man and he was a humanist, and his movies were a lot about humanity. He was often described as the master of cynicism and things like this, but when you look back and see all of his best films you can tell he is a humanist more than anything else.

NJ: Another director you worked with quite a lot is Benoît Jacquot – a slightly different approach perhaps?

IH: Not so much. All these directors, because they don't make too many camera movements or

try too many locations for the camera, are quite similar. Benoît Jacquot and Claude Chabrol know exactly why they want to film one person and usually they don't try to privilege one aspect of that person over the other. They try to film the person in herself, which is a very nice feeling for an actor because you don't feel obliged to project one aspect of your personality more than another.

NJ: One of the things that attaches itself to you is the idea that you play a lot of cool characters who are quite intellectual, but I also see you in many comedy roles.

IH: But you can be an intellectual and have fun... poor intellectual people otherwise! I don't think I have played intellectual roles. I never know what that means. There has been a little confusion between the roles, and what you perceive in the actress or the actor and the film. It is more because I was in certain types of films that have a certain depth and a certain amount of reflection and a certain vision of the world, so you tend to identify the actress as the director in a way. For example, I don't think the piano teacher [in Michael Haneke's *The Piano Teacher*, 2001] is an intellectual role. No role is either intellectual or not, all roles are both, and carnal too. So it is hard for me to make the



Testament of youth: Huppert and Depardieu in Maurice Pialat's *Loulou* (1980)

⬅ difference between intellectual roles and the lighter roles. But you do have dramas, you do have comedies, you do have more or less light films and that makes a difference.

NJ: I was thinking about *The Nun* [2013], about your performance as the mother superior and it really felt like you were having a lot of fun in that role.

IH: Normally I don't feel obliged to read the literary material a movie is based on: for example, I have never read *The Piano Teacher* by Elfriede Jelinek because Michael Haneke had asked me not to. But if you read *The Nun* by Denis Diderot, the whole section about my character is really funny, completely crazy. So instinctively or intuitively the book really infused my idea about the character and I finally had fun doing it. Most of the situations – except for the end, of course, when the poor woman dies – are quite funny.

NJ: One of my favourite films of yours is *White Material* [2009]. How does Claire Denis work with you?

IH: Some movies are more or less influenced by where you shoot them. It is like in *Valley of Love*: the story becomes more significant because it is set in this extraordinary landscape of Death Valley. *White Material* was the same. We shot it in Cameroon and it is something to do a movie in these conditions. It was the same with this other film, *Captive* [2012], I did in the Philippines with Brillante Mendoza. The geography, the weather, the heat and the situation in which you shoot this kind of film are all quite determining. It also has to do with the way Claire Denis made the film and her great, great talent.

I came to her because I wanted to do a film based on *The Grass is Singing*, Doris Lessing's first book. When you read the book it's hard to imagine that she wrote it when she was 27 years old, just after she moved from Africa back to England – the book is just amazing. So I brought it to Claire and asked her to do it. And she thought about it for some time, but then she thought that the character in the book might be a little bit out of time because the situation in Africa is not the same now. The apartheid system described in Doris Lessing's book has changed and things have evolved. So she kept the idea of a white woman in Africa in a certain situation, but instead of being a victim, the character turns into a fighter, because, after all these years she thought the mentality had changed in such a way that you could maybe describe the character more like in a book by J.M. Coetzee, the great South African writer. But the origin of the collaboration between me and Claire was this story by Doris Lessing and it ended up being *White Material* and she co-wrote the script with the great French writer Marie N'Diaye.

NJ: You mentioned earlier that you've made films without a script at all. I'm intrigued.

IH: The first one I did was with Godard. A script is a mass of information, so Godard finds other ways of sending us information, like paintings, music, little notes that he would leave, and that was enough to feed your imagination. There is a basic storyline, if you can call it that, and characters, but not actually a script. More recently, there was another experience like this, and even more so than for *Slow Motion* [aka *Every Man for Himself*, 1980] or *Passion* [1982] with Godard:

Hong Sang-soo's *In Another Country* [2012]. I went to Korea, and he told me I was going to play three characters. I was very happy. That was very exciting. And he asked me to bring certain kinds of clothes, which I did. And every night he would write the scenes, which we had to learn for the next day. I had to learn quickly and efficiently, and never improvise, except for a couple of scenes. The amazing thing is that we shot that film in nine days. I was meant to be there two weeks, and after nine days, it was over.

I liked working with Chabrol very much. I don't think he said one word in terms of direction of my character in six films

NJ: You were in *Heaven's Gate*, an incredibly ambitious film by Michael Cimino. It cost a lot of money to make and it didn't make the money back so it got a reputation for being a fiasco, but years later it was re-evaluated and is now considered to be a great work, which happens to have been one of your earliest performances in English. Can you tell us about that experience?

IH: Well, many people know about the fate of this movie. To me it is a great film, a huge, mad film. It carries something mad in it, but this madness gives wonder to the film. It is so far away from the narrative storytelling codes of American cinema that its debut came as a shock. It was difficult to accept that a film could be that expensive, a film that could be like a dream, as Cimino put it. But dreams can be erratic: the story might not make much sense, you can focus



Performing miracles: Huppert with Claude Chabrol on the set of *The Cry of the Owl* (1987)



Caught in the act: Huppert with Benoît Jacquot on the set of *No Scandal* (aka *Keep it Quiet*, 1999)

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GETTY IMAGES (2)

on a face forever. By saying that, he certainly made a statement. But now it is accepted as a great film, and for me, every time I listen to the music, I feel a lot of emotion because the music is so wonderful. It reminds me of the shoot. I was supposed to be there for two months, and I ended up being there for about six or seven months.

NJ: Keeping films like *Heaven's Gate* in mind, has your way of deciding which projects to work on changed at all? Do you now have complete freedom to choose who you work with?

IH: You can't decide who you want to work with. That would be ideal, working with the best directors in the world, but it's not possible because it is always so compromised. You can dream of it and sometimes it happens. Like, recently I made *Elle* with Paul Verhoeven and I never thought I would work with him. I first knew about Verhoeven when I saw *Turkish Delight* [1973], in Dutch. After all these years he came to me and asked me to make a movie with him, something which happened only in my best dreams. So sometimes it happens. Also, the life of an actress is made of unexpected encounters, including those with directors whose names you've never heard before, and that's the beauty of it. If it was only about your own desires being fulfilled it would be boring.

NJ: Let me put it another way: your career has shown that, unlike many other actors, you are curious to work in many different places. Not many actors can work in Korea or with so many brilliant directors. It is your curiosity that I want to talk about. Do you always feel like you're in need of change?

IH: It goes beyond me being an actress; it is, as you mention, my own curiosity as a human being. I like to see new things all the time. I like to travel. I like to be abroad. And doing movies is, in a way, travelling within yourself or within someone else's universe. Like a double trip: within yourself, to the director's universe, and also to other parts of the world, and I love it.

NJ: And do you also like to test yourself?

IH: No, I don't think about testing myself, because if it was about that, I wouldn't do it. You can find yourself in extreme situations. *Captive* was one of the most physically difficult roles. No role is difficult in itself, but sometimes there are physical conditions that are harder than others. And it was certainly very difficult in that film. This situation of being displaced from one place to another; living the life of hostages for some time, was hard. *Brillante* is very special in that way and he was able to create the conditions of reality – being attacked, being threatened, being cold, being warm – in such a way that it was sometimes very difficult. Had I known that before, I would have never done it.

NJ: Recently *Sight & Sound* did an issue about 100 undervalued films directed by women [S&S, October 2015]. You wrote a beautiful piece in it about Barbara Loden's *Wanda* [1970]. Would you like to talk about that?

IH: It was a brilliant idea, asking all these actresses to write about forgotten films. *Wanda* is not so much forgotten now in France, because I saw it a few years ago and rereleased the film there. The film had also been released in the first place. It was even praised at the time by people like Marguerite



Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* (1980)

Duras who wrote quite a feminist text in *Cahiers du Cinéma*. I fell in love with the film and with Barbara Loden. It was directed and acted by her. She was Elia Kazan's wife. She made only this film, and it's like a little jewel. You can tell she is a victim, but in the end she is not because she resists so much, and she has a way of resisting that's really special. She doesn't do it like a fighter or with masculine weapons, but does it in an even more inflexible way. In the end you can only love this character, and the movie is so brilliant.

NJ: We could talk a little about *Louder than Bombs*, in which, in a way, you are already dead when the film begins. What a strange role to play.

IH: Yes, indeed, it is a strange role. Joachim Trier did two other films before that were quite successful in France. He is a brilliant filmmaker and this one is quite ambitious, to the point that it's not easy to summarise. It is about loss, death, family and how you combine your exterior passions and objectives, together with your more intimate life, which is a theme that's not often featured if you think about it. We are all social people in a certain way, and then when we are back at home we are totally different. He is trying, through that theme – and I think he succeeds – to understand how to make the connection between the social person, between your work, between what you watch, what you see, what you resent as a social person, and also



Hong Sang-soo's *In Another Country* (2012)

what you are when you are within the walls of your house once the social commitment is over.

My character is dead when the movie starts. I'm a mother of two boys. She is a war photographer who has to witness the pain of the world, and when she comes home it is difficult for her to cope with her life as a mother, as a wife. After she dies, you realise she is a different person, not only to herself – as if she thought she was two people – but for each family member, and that is also something that makes you think a lot in the film.

NJ: You were talking about working in very difficult conditions. *Valley of Love* was shot in Death Valley. Was it at a particularly hot time?

IH: Yes, we shot in September, so it was very hot. But it was completely key for the roles, for the relationship between the two of us and that was the director's idea. By the mere fact of putting these two characters into this heat and this landscape, you feel like you are not on Earth any more. There were two of us, alone, in this huge landscape and you read the relationship between those two characters immediately, just through the confrontation with the elements. You see these two little people and it is as if they are almost the first man and woman on Earth. ☺

i With thanks to Festival Internacional de Cine de Morelia. *Valley of Love* is released in UK cinemas on 12 August and is reviewed on page 91



The way of the gun: Huppert in Claire Denis's *White Material* (2009)



AN AUTUMN TALE

When her children leave home, her husband runs off with another woman, and her career as a philosophy lecturer starts to hit the skids, sixtysomething Nathalie finds herself facing a newfound freedom that is also a gaping void, in Mia Hansen-Løve's warm, funny drama 'Things to Come'

By Catherine Wheatley

It's a brave woman who casts Isabelle Huppert as a thinly veiled version of her mother, given that incest (Christophe Honoré's *Ma mère*) and attempted infanticide (Claude Chabrol's *Merci pour le chocolat*) rank among her tamer cinematic crimes. Still, for her fifth film, *Things to Come*, writer-director Mia Hansen-Løve has done just that. After adapting for the screen the stories of her uncle (*All Is Forgiven*, 2007), her friend Humbert Balsan (*Father of My Children*, 2009) her younger self (*Goodbye First Love*, 2011) and her brother (*Eden*, 2014), *Things to Come* draws from the life of her mother, Laurence. A luminous, affecting film, confidently directed, it has a more mature feel, in all ways, than her previous work.

I met Hansen-Løve at her Paris apartment, where a poster emblazoned with the name of Eric Rohmer hangs on the wall. The New Wave auteur has a profound influence on her work, she admits, not least because he's so unafraid of dialogue. In any case, Hansen-Løve thinks any dichotomy between words and actions is a false one. "I like filming characters talking," she tells me. "The voice, the body, their position – this is physical too."

Certainly Huppert's 60-odd philosophy professor Nathalie is given to long philosophical diatribes. Holding forth in the classroom, her speech crackling with conviction, or stomping through Paris in platform espadrilles and suede jacket, she is a force of nature, an erudite action heroine of sorts. Nathalie's husband has run off with

another woman, her adult children have left the nest, her mother is increasingly dependent on her, and her career – arguably the greatest love of her life – is slipping from her grasp. By rights, she should be on the verge of a breakdown. Yet in one of the warmest, most vibrant performances in her formidable 45-year career, Huppert shows the remarkable strength of this woman, the sudden recipient of a total freedom that is also a gaping void.

Hansen-Løve spent time talking to me about motherhood, ageing, and her personal investment in her films. As I was leaving I asked whether she was familiar with the philosopher Stanley Cavell's book *Contesting Tears*, in which he argues that many classic Hollywood melodramas are tacitly concerned with the education – and isolation – of women of a certain age. "My mother is obsessed with Cavell," she said, laughing. "I suppose now I'll have to read it."

Catherine Wheatley: Films about female philosophy professors are quite rare. Could you tell me about the inspiration for the film?

Mia Hansen-Løve: My parents were both philosophy professors – they're retired now, but my mother still works a lot. It's the world I grew up in. The idea of teaching, the atmosphere of the apartment, the couple that they form – these things are all drawn from my memories of my childhood and youth.

People often talk about my films as autobio-

THE FACTS OF LIFE
Mia Hansen-Løve (right), who drew on her mother's career as a philosophy professor for *Things to Come*, starring Isabelle Huppert (left), says, 'In my films there's a balance between fidelity to certain facts of the life of the person who inspires me, and the fictional elements I bring in'

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CARLOS ALVAREZ/GETTY IMAGES



graphical works, but in fact I've never presented my parents' universe in such a direct manner. I did think about giving Nathalie a different job, but that made me realise that the question of philosophy, of teaching, and the specificity of the job was really at the heart of the film.

CW: In your films, you evoke the details of very specialised fields – filmmaking, architecture, the garage music scene, philosophy. How do you go about researching these areas?

MHL: It's true that each of my films concentrates on a particular vocation. For me there's an aspect of cinema that has to do with the exploration of a world. Sometimes those are worlds I know well, other times less well, but either way I wish to immerse myself as deeply as possible in a universe, and to depict it in a very precise way.

In terms of research, then, it's a mix of already being familiar with the subject and doing a little more digging. For example, I asked my mother for a lot of help with the teaching scenes in *Things to Come*. It was a bit the same with my brother [Sven, who co-wrote *Eden*]. I gave her an outline – a scene that talks about Rousseau, for example – and she wrote it, and then I reworked it. Obviously this is only for the scenes that talk about philosophy – I would have been absolutely incapable of writing these on my own. I'm not a philosophy professor.

CW: Your brother Sven has a co-writing credit for *Eden*, and it's clear that the story and the character of the DJ Paul are based on him and his experiences. Is the same true of Nathalie and your mother?

MHL: The character of Nathalie is inspired by mother. In all my films there's a sort of balance between fidelity to certain facts of the life of the person who inspires me, and the fictional elements that I bring in. And in the end it often becomes difficult for me to distinguish between true and false. I try to be very, very faithful to reality, but that's as I perceive it – a very subjective version of reality. It's not that all the events in the film correspond to something that really happened or that Isabelle particularly looks like my mother. It's not literal – if I'd wanted that I'd have made a documentary and that doesn't interest me at all. It's a transposition. It's fiction. But I try to find a kind of truth about my mother's life at a particular moment in time, as I saw it. So for me it's completely truthful, and completely fictional, both at the same time.

CW: It struck me watching Nathalie that she's always in motion, she never rests.

MHL: That was what made it possible for me to make this

In all my films there is this duality – between light and dark, happiness and sorrow, life and death, optimism and pessimism

film. When I first began to make notes for it, I was very anxious. The subject frightened me. I didn't want the film to be very pessimistic, but at the same time I wanted to be sincere. I didn't want to make the story more positive than it was. In the end, the thing that allowed me to want to make the film was precisely the fact that this is a character who is always in movement. There's something in that movement that leads me towards the light, towards life, towards joy.

CW: In fact, this is the funniest of your films to date.

MHL: The humour in the film completely escaped me. I had no intention of making my funniest or lightest film with this one, and I only realised this was the case after we'd completed it, because it was something that lots of people commented on, and I saw in the screening room that people were laughing – at Isabelle, the cat, the other characters. The tone of my film came from the characters. And in fact it was really the character Isabelle Huppert brought to life, Nathalie, who brought that colour and spirit to the film – there's almost something burlesque about her.

CW: The scenes featuring Edith Scob are very funny too. How did you cast the film?

MHL: I had Isabelle in mind from the beginning. I couldn't imagine another actor in the role. She has the grace and femininity required for the role, but also the charisma, strength, authority. The spirituality, even. It's difficult to play a philosophy professor. I'm quite demanding because having grown up with two philosophy professors for parents, when I see them on film I often find them false, awkward – caricatured or naive. I wanted it to be really authentic and for me, Isabelle was the only one who could bring that to the film.

As for Edith, I thought of her very early too. I'd seen her in Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face* [1960], but also in *Summer Hours* [2008], by Olivier Assayas [Hansen-Løve's husband], which I thought she was fantastic in, and so I'd kept her in mind when writing the script. In part I wanted her because there is such a strong resemblance, both in terms of appearance and spirit, between her and my grandmother, on whom I partly based the character of Nathalie's mother. She's someone who is very feminine, very coquettish and who is a bit – well, not crazy, but faux-crazy. She's sort of failed to move beyond childhood. I was really interested in the duo formed by her and Isabelle because they are at once very different and at the same time they have something in common, which has to do with a certain freedom that they have.

CW: It's a difficult set of relationships between Nathalie and her mother, and Nathalie and her daughter Chloé. It feels like the tension between being a mother and being a child is difficult for these women. Is that something you wanted the film to show?

MHL: Yes, although it came to me in a manner that was rather unformulated. I wrote some of these scenes without analysing them or talking them through and it's quite difficult to talk about them now because it's only really as I'm being asked about them that I'm rationalising them. What I can say, a posteriori, is that Nathalie loses her husband at the same time as her mother and her daughter are becoming distant from her and finds herself in a kind of solitude that really has to do with that time in her life, that age. I don't want to say that it's like that for everyone, but it strikes me how often this

FAMILY TIES
Hansen-Løve cast Edith Scob as Yvette, the mother of Isabelle Huppert's Nathalie, in *Things to Come* (below), after admiring her work in Olivier Assayas's *Summer Hours* (2008)



happens to women of Nathalie's age all at once. And it's the time when many professional lives come to an end too. I wondered, "How do these women cope? Where do they find the strength? How do they survive?" And in fact it's really as a response to these questions that I made the film. I became aware of everything that one loses, at my mother's age, and it terrified me. When I said I was scared of making this film, that's why. What meaning does the future have in these circumstances? What meaning can it have when you're confronted with all these losses at once?

You rarely see people of this age on film and when you do it's always with a happy ending – the couple break up but they get back together, or the woman finds another love. It's all very reassuring. I don't try to give easy responses – the future is still open. The path is above all an interior one, and that's what I came to understand while making the film. It's not that I identify myself with these women; on the contrary, I am astonished by their strength. But I came to understand a little, and to give myself courage.

CW: There's so much death in the film, and so much loss. But we also see a baby being born. Sorrow and joy seem to go hand in hand within the film.

MHL: In all my films there is this duality – between light and dark, happiness and sorrow, life and death, optimism and pessimism. There's an ambivalence that you find in all my films, perhaps because it's part of my personality. But it might also have to do with the fact that I never went to film school. I've been very lucky to be able to write films as a kind of translation of my world view, without having to pass through a screenwriting system, full of ideas about what's good and bad, efficient and inefficient. I've always had confidence in the spectator: in their ability to put together a story, to manage ellipses, to fill gaps. I think it can be stimulating for them. And that's why my films are perceived as so ambiguous. At film school they teach writers to say things very clearly, it's more black and white – I'm simplifying, of course – but in effect I have the right to write in shades of grey because no one ever forced me to be more explicit.

CW: I'm interested in the scene after her student Fabien [Roman Kolinka] drops Nathalie off and we shift our attention on to him driving away. It's the only scene where Nathalie's not there, and we suddenly seem to shift focus.

MHL: These three or four shots of Roman are very significant for me. In a way it's my favourite moment in the film because while we were filming it – and we shot it after the rest of the film was finished because it's winter – and when we watched it back, it felt to me that the whole film has been leading up to this sequence. Not because Fabien is the more important character, but because this scene reveals something about Nathalie. What I really like is that in the film there are many different paths around Nathalie and it's like the branches drop one after another, and at the end of the summer even this thing with Fabien ends badly. But when she meets him again something takes place – I mean nothing really happens, but there's something secret, mysterious, erotically charged – and suddenly there are these shots of him that are really charged too.

For me it's very comforting because Nathalie is not sexual within the film. She is deprived of love. She's alone. There's a lack, a frustration. There's something



very cruel in her solitude and in this withdrawal of contact. And yet in this sequence the eroticism transfers itself to her. It's a bit abstract. But this sequence liberates her, or liberates something in her. It's as if she's in the shot, she's in him, she's changed something in him. And that's very sensual.

CW: You've worked with Roman in three films now.

MHL: When I filmed him in *Eden* I had a sort of revelation. I thought he was incredible and I wanted to work with him again in *Things to Come* and I wrote a film for him to take the lead in [the forthcoming, provisionally entitled *War Reporter*]. When I filmed him in *Eden* it was as if I found in him the 'note' I had been looking for in other actors. That's not to disparage other actors, but when I filmed him in *Eden* I realised, "That's it. That's what I've been looking for." There's something in him that goes to the heart of my cinema.

CW: The last scene makes moving use of *The Fleetwoods'* version of 'Unchained Melody'. You use very little music in the film, but when you do it feels very deliberate. Why this particular track?

MHL: After *Eden* I really wanted silence, so my idea for *Things to Come* was simple: to use as little music as possible. We used only four pieces, but each has a real density, a very particular meaning.

What happened with 'Unchained Melody' is that the mixer on the film [Olivier Goinard] – who is the mixer on all my films – heard the track a few months before filming began and he sent it to me, saying that it made him think of my films. And the track really affected me.

What I love about it within the film is that it's as if it says something that the film doesn't say. It feels like the final piece of the puzzle. It speaks of physical love in a way that's never articulated clearly in the film. It's there, but it's never made explicit. We never hear Nathalie talk about finding love with another man, about physical desire or sensuality. What's really nice though is that the song works both as a lullaby for her grandson, who she is cradling at the film's end, and as a kind of address to a longed-for lover. It's like a sigh. Like something has been held back and held back and – finally – it is released. 📍



Things to Come is released on 2 September and is reviewed on page 89

LEARNING CURVE
Nathalie with her favourite student Fabien, played by Roman Kolinka, who is set to take the lead in Hansen-Løve's next film, the provisionally titled *War Reporter*

ALWAYS BE YOURSELF: THE MAKING OF INGRID BERGMAN

Ingrid Bergman was always first and foremost an actor rather than a star, and her formative years on screen in Sweden, and later Germany, shaped the remarkable talent that would soon make her a Hollywood legend

By Pamela Hutchinson

Ingrid Bergman's Hollywood exit was far more dramatic, and famous, than her entrance. In 1949, fresh from the success of *Casablanca* (1942), *Gaslight* (1944) and her Hitchcock movies – *Spellbound* (1945), *Notorious* (1946) and *Under Capricorn* (1949) – the Swedish star went to Italy, to work with a director she hugely admired: Roberto Rossellini. On the set of *Stromboli* (1950), admiration turned to love, and the married Bergman embarked on an affair with her director, which resulted in a pregnancy, and a ferocious scandal in the US. Bergman lost custody of the daughter she had with her husband Petter Lindström, but the row soon grew beyond tabloid interest in their divorce, and her swift remarriage. The actor flew back to Europe after she had been denounced as a terrible role model in the newspapers, while religious groups complained that her conduct tended to “glorify adultery”, and in Washington, the influential senator Edwin C. Johnson labelled Rossellini a drug addict and “an infamous Nazi collaborator”, thundering: “Out of Ingrid Bergman's ashes will grow a better Hollywood.”

Even a scandal that deep can't last for ever in show business. Bergman was back on American screens six years later in *Anastasia* (1956), in a role that won her a second Oscar. An official apology was made for that vicious attack, in the senate in 1972. Stig Björkman's sensi-

tive new documentary *Ingrid Bergman: In Her Own Words*, diligently covers the actor's disgrace, and the difficulties it exacerbated in her relationships with her children, but refreshingly that is not its sole focus. The film, which is shaped by Bergman's diaries and letters (read by Alicia Vikander), as well as her copious home-movie footage, reveals the fascinating beginnings of her career too. Bergman's early years reveal not just her ambitions as an actor, but the way she separated her work and home life, and the quiet assurance with which she approached her Hollywood debut. It's a joy to learn, also, that the performances Bergman gave in her Swedish films offer us a glimpse of her accomplished English-language work. Years before her career was shaken by scandal, a portrait emerges of Bergman as an actor who was privately very independent, and at her best playing mysterious women with secrets they dare not tell.

Bergman was born in Stockholm in 1915. Her Swedish father Justus, an artist and keen photographer, and German mother Friedel had lost two infant children before she was born. Bergman was named after a toddler princess in the Swedish royal family and her father began as he meant to go on, recording his daughter's life in pictures. “I was perhaps the most photographed child in Scandinavia,” she joked to her biographer 

WOMAN ON THE VERGE
In her early Swedish films, Ingrid Bergman – pictured in 1939, the year she arrived in America – was at her best when she was playing mysterious women with secrets they dare not tell





*I love the freedom
I feel in front of
the camera. I hope
I've not made a
mistake, and that
one day I'll be a
great actress*

IN THE BEGINNING
Ingrid Bergman (from
top) as an extra, second
from left, at the back
of the queue in Gunnar
Skoglund's *Landskamp*
(1932); as a graphic designer
in Carl Froelich's German
production *The Four
Companions* (1938); and as
a chambermaid in her first
speaking role, in *The Count
of the Old Town* (1934)



Charlotte Chandler. When Bergman was just two years old, her mother died, a trauma she was too young to comprehend at the time, but which she later described as “living with an ache”, one that “began so early and was so constant, I was not aware of it”. Throughout her childhood, Bergman’s father continued to photograph and film his only child, and young Ingrid, who was already fond of dancing, soon became relaxed in front of a camera. In 1929, when Bergman was 13, her father died of stomach cancer, a loss she felt very keenly, and which precipitated her move to live with relatives.

Aged 15, Bergman took her first job in a film studio, as an extra. Entering the studio “felt like walking on holy ground”, she wrote, and she found it so thrilling that she wanted to stay, and she left her vivid yellow make-up on for her journey home, so that anyone who saw her would know that she worked in the movies. A still from *Landskamp* (1932) reproduced in Björkman’s documentary shows Bergman at the tail-end of a queue of extras, craning her neck either to ensure her face appeared on camera, or to take in the sights of the hallowed soundstage.

In the early 1930s, Sweden had a stable and productive film industry, even if it continued to feel the absence of two directors who had been crucial to its golden age in the early 1920s – Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller – and the star power of Greta Garbo. Bergman was impatient to be a part of it, and while she was studying at the Royal Dramatic Theatre School she asked her Uncle Gunnar, a florist, for a favour. One of his customers was the former actor and sometime director Karin Swanström, who was now artistic director at the Swedish Films Studio. Gunnar persuaded Swanström to give Bergman an audition, a poetry recital that she described in self-deprecating terms. “Karin watched me emoting all over the room,” she wrote in her memoir, “and she didn’t look ill, so that wasn’t a bad start.” Far from sickened, Swanström arranged a screen test for Bergman with director Gustaf Molander.

When she first saw herself on screen, despite her ease in front of the camera, Bergman was shocked and disappointed. “I didn’t look very good, did I?” she told Molander. “I think if I did some more I could be better later.” Molander reassured her, telling her that her personality came across well on film, and saying: “You have great possibilities.” Nevertheless, she would become known at the studio for this combination of self-criticism and optimism, which punctuated almost every take, and she was nicknamed ‘Betterlater’ by the crew. More than a decade later, accepting her first Best Actress Oscar for *Gaslight*, she expressed the same thought, saying: “I hope that in the future I’ll be worthy of it.” Bergman credited Molander with teaching her to underplay emotion, and for offering the pragmatic advice: “Always be yourself, and always learn your lines.” The films she went on to make with him in Sweden were among her very best.

Molander did not, however, direct Bergman in her first speaking role, in *The Count of the Old Town* (*Munkbrogreven*, 1934); that job fell to actor Edvin Adolphson, a known flirt who was at that time attempting to divert Bergman from her more formal courtship with Lindström. It’s a comedy, and Bergman plays a cheery chambermaid wooed by a charming and mysterious gadabout. Bergman appears breezy and cute, but when she shares a love scene with her leading man, she displays a hint of the reserved passion of her Ilsa Lund in *Casablanca* – fear

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mixed with affection and desire. Bergman already felt at home on a film set, able to evoke complex emotions rather than falling back on stage-school mannerisms. Many reviews praised her, welcoming an actor of great talent and confidence, although Bergman, who was 5ft 9in tall, remembered best the stinging comments that she was “somewhat overweight” and “hefty but quite sure of herself”. The garish and unflattering striped dress she was given as a costume may have been more to blame for that impression than anything else.

Soon Bergman had a contract with Swedish Films for 75 kronor a day and the bonus, perhaps especially important for a 19-year-old woman, that she could keep all the clothes she wore in her movies. Unsurprisingly the director of her theatre school, Molander’s brother, was horrified, but Bergman was determined to work in the cinema, and comforted herself with the thought that the studio would pay for her to take more drama lessons.

Whether it was due to the lessons or Bergman’s own perfectionism, her career progressed very happily at Swedish Films. Within Sweden, she became a star. “I love the freedom I feel in front of the camera,” she wrote in 1935. “I hope I’ve not made a mistake, and that one day I’ll be a great actress.” She read the reviews of her performances, which were soon glowing with praise, but feared believing in them too much. “There’s a rumour I’m the greatest talent around... I hope I’ve not become vain.” In 1936, she made the film that would eventually

take her to Hollywood. Bergman had made a handful of films with Molander already, but *Intermezzo* was to be a showcase for her talent: “I created *Intermezzo* for her,” said Molander, “but I was not responsible for its success. Ingrid herself made it successful.” In this film, Bergman plays Anita, a piano teacher who falls in love with the married father of her pupil, a concert violinist. It was a wonderful role for Bergman, and the plot echoed her own conflict between her devotion to her work and her personal life – problems that were only just beginning to appear at this time. As Anita, Bergman can be sweet and girlish, but also – when playing the piano and in the romantic scenes – riven with passion. She also has chic costumes, glamorous make-up and lingering close-ups to show her to her best advantage. Molander’s film is lyrical and emotionally complex, drawing out the chemistry between his attractive May-December leads. Playing opposite Bergman was Gösta Ekman, a legendary and very handsome theatre and film actor whom Bergman had worked with once before, and professionally speaking, utterly worshipped. *Intermezzo*, and Bergman’s performance in it, were rapturously praised by critics in Sweden and around the world. Now, Miss Betterlater could afford to become ambitious.

First Bergman returned to the stage, and then she started getting picky about her film roles. Unimpressed at being offered yet another *ingénue* role in Molander’s *Only One Night* (1939), Bergman demanded

COMING TO AMERICA
Bergman with Gösta Ekman in Gustaf Molander’s *Intermezzo* (1936), the film that brought her to Hollywood after catching the eye of David O. Selznick, who produced the 1939 remake in which she starred opposite Leslie Howard



I never had the intention of staying in Sweden. It was too far away and too small a country. I wanted to go to big places

to try something new, asking to play a disfigured and bitter character in the director's *A Woman's Face* (*En kvinnas ansikte*, 1938) first. Anna, Bergman's character, is a vicious, unsympathetic criminal, grimly scarred by burns. Bergman's face was distorted by glue, make-up and a brace worn inside her cheek to push it out at an angle. Elegant in posture despite her mangled visage, Bergman gives a sharp and chilling performance. As the film proceeds, Anna has plastic surgery to smooth her features, and Bergman shows her character softening too. Still, it's often a bleak chamber piece, and a forerunner of the psychological horrors Bergman would portray in *Gaslight*. Bergman was nervous about the film's reception ("My life's role, but I wonder what people are going to say when they see me as this terrible witch"), but she needn't have been. Anna was just an ugly version of the troubled, secretive women she played so well. *A Woman's Face* was remade by MGM in 1941, with Joan Crawford as the lead, and a happier, less complicated ending.

RIDE WITH THE DEVIL

Bergman's next bold move was more precarious. She had itchy feet, and the Swedish film industry couldn't offer her everything she wanted. "I never had the intention of staying in Sweden," she wrote. "It was too far away and too small a country. I wanted to go to big places." In spring 1938, newly married to Lindström, and pregnant with their daughter Pia, she took a contract with UFA, the German studio. If Bergman was naive about the political situation in Germany when she signed the paperwork, the truth was hard to avoid when she arrived in Berlin, and she quickly regretted her decision. In her memoirs she said: "I saw very quickly that if you were anybody at all in films, you had to be a member of the Nazi party."

She made one film at UFA, a movie intended to launch her international career ("The bridge that would bring me over"), in which she plays the most glamorous of four young female graphic designers setting up their own agency, while having the requisite romantic

misadventures on the side. *The Four Companions* (*Die vier Gesellen*, 1938) was directed by Carl Froelich and it's a disarming mixture of bright comedy, feeble feminism and romantic drama interspersed with now poignant street scenes in late 1930s Berlin. Despite her qualms about the language, Bergman's performance is excellent, and it's a charming film. However, concerned by what she saw in Berlin, Bergman returned to Stockholm to have her baby, abandoning her commitment to UFA, if not formally cancelling her contract. Bergman later suggested that her guilt about working for UFA at this time was the motivation for her volunteer work entertaining the American troops during World War II and for her final screen performance in the TV biopic *A Woman Named Golda* (1982), about the Israeli prime minister Golda Meir.

After the failure of the German experiment, Bergman found herself at home, with a husband and a baby and contemplating a smaller life than the one she had begun to dream of. But without her knowledge, *Intermezzo* was working its magic on the other side of the Atlantic, and although there had been previous overtures "from the heart of the film world", the next call would be different. The producer David O. Selznick had sent the head of his New York office, Kay Brown, to scout out European films that would be ripe for a remake, and she didn't have to look far to find *Intermezzo*. The Swedish immigrant parents of the boy who ran the elevator in her Park Avenue building had loved the movie, and knowing that Brown was looking for tips, he passed on their rave. So Brown saw the film, but wasn't quite as impressed. "I reported on *Intermezzo* to David as story material, but I did not go overboard about it," she remembered. "But I went madly overboard about the girl. I thought she was the beginning and the end of all things wonderful." Selznick disagreed. He thought *Intermezzo* "one of the best screen stories in the world", but took his time to fall for Bergman. His son remembered a wide range of concerns: "She didn't speak English, she was too tall, her name sounded too German, and her eyebrows were too thick."

When Selznick changed his mind, Brown was dispatched to Sweden to sign up Bergman. When Brown had first tried to call, she was in labour with Pia, and Lindström simply told her: "Miss Bergman is busy at the moment and cannot talk to you." A personal visit was called for, where Brown discovered – in Bergman's words – "a diva who had just given birth" who sat calmly knitting while the contract negotiations took place. Bergman refused the conventional seven-year contract, but did say yes to *Intermezzo* (1939), a remake of the original, with Leslie Howard as her lover. Bergman returned immediately after that shoot to make the noirish romance *Juninatten* (1940) in Sweden, but Selznick soon lured her back with a five-year deal.

Hollywood would be Bergman's home for a decade, and more. And when she sailed to America alone – her family would follow later – she was happy to be independent and sure that she had made the right decision. She wrote to a friend that one night on the crossing, a stranger made the mistake of commenting that she couldn't possibly become an actor, because she was too tall. Bergman made no reply, but told herself: "He knows nothing about me." ☺



Ingrid Bergman: In Her Own Words is released in UK cinemas on 12 August and is reviewed on page 78

WRITTEN IN THE SCARS
Ingrid Bergman gives a chilling performance in *A Woman's Face* (1938), playing a criminal who receives plastic surgery to restore her looks after her face has been scarred in childhood. 'My life's role,' she noted, 'but I wonder what people are going to say when they see me as this terrible witch.'

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I WILL SURVIVE
Blake Lively, as Nancy, whose surfing trip to a remote Mexican beach becomes a fight for survival after she is attacked by a shark in Jaime Collet-Serra's 'The Shallows'



SURVIVAL INSTINCTS

For the past decade or so, Spanish director Jaume Collet-Serra has carved a successful niche in the US making high-quality, middle-budget genre pictures, the latest of which is the jaw-droppingly entertaining shark attack thriller 'The Shallows'

By Nick Pinkerton

In what is easily the most dispiriting multiplex season in memory we cling to whatever we can, and the general mediocrity only serves as a contrast to the qualities of Jaume Collet-Serra's *The Shallows*, a taut, focused little thriller about Blake Lively weathering repeated assaults by a great white shark while... clinging to whatever she can. Lively is on a solitary sentimental pilgrimage to a cloistered beach in Mexico beloved of her late mother, when the man-eater interrupts her surfing, leaving her with a gory love nip and pinning her down overnight on a little rocky promontory where she has to match her smarts against the shark's superior speed and killer instinct. The film has a nice reined-in sense of scale, the action mostly restrained to a few yards of perilous, patrolled surf, between just a handful of temporary havens on the open water – the rocks which disappear at high tide, a buoy and a half-masticated whale corpse. Moving from blissy, sun-kissed communion with nature to desperate hanging on for dear life, it is tactile in the extreme, attuned to the body in pleasure and pain, the latter especially in one of the more harrowing improvised field surgery scenes in memory. All this, and a knockout avant-garde short in the closing credits!

It is impossible to make a shark picture without invoking the progenitor of the modern monster movie, Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) – the film usually seized on as the beginning of the end in the oft-repeated narrative of the rise and fall of New Hollywood, guilty of ushering in the era of the movie-as-thrill-ride and the summer blockbuster. But though the \$9 million price tag of *Jaws*'s over-budget shoot was considered relatively exorbitant when the film was released in June 1975, this adjusts with inflation to a little over \$40 million. In the contemporary scene where tentpole releases routinely come in at four or five times that cost, that's a drop in the chum bucket. This is what makes Jaume Collet-Serra an intriguing outlier. When franchise superstructures and bet-the-house mega-productions are the rule, he has carved out his niche making middle-range standalone genre pictures. And without receiving too much attention, he's gotten damn good at making them.

Collet-Serra is 42 years old. In a feature filmmaking career that has lasted a little over a decade, he has formed his own production house, Ombra Films, and completed seven films as a director, of which six are somewhere on the spectrum of quality between good and excellent, and one of which is *Goal II: Living the Dream* (2007). He has done this without ever taking on any of the arthritic serious-mindedness that plagues genre work today. In fact he seems to have little instinct for self-promotion, and the circulated details of his autobiography fit comfortably on a cocktail napkin.





TRUE GRIT
Jaume Collet-Serra's trio of high-adrenaline action films with Liam Neeson – (above, from left) *Unknown* (2011), *Non-Stop* (2014) and *Run all Night* (2015) – will be joined by a fourth, *The Commuter*, next year



At age 18 Collet-Serra left his native Catalonia to attend Columbia College Hollywood in Los Angeles, of which he is perhaps the most successful alumnus. He hit the ground running, shot commercials and music videos, and caught the eye of Joel Silver and Robert Zemeckis at Dark Castle Entertainment, who tapped him for his debut feature. The result was *House of Wax* (2005), the most recent remoulding of Charles S. Belden's story 'The Wax Works', filmed by André de Toth, with Vincent Price, in 1953 – though in Collet-Serra's rendition it just as closely resembles drive-in schlock standard *Tourist Trap* (1979). A caravan of twentysomethings en route to a college football game in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, are waylaid in the hamlet of Ambrose, formerly famous for its wax museum – though, upon further investigation, the entire town is discovered to be a vast waxworks, from the chapel to the movie theatre, where Robert Aldrich's *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962) is playing on a loop. Ambrose is the dominion of demented twin brothers Bo and Vincent (Brian Van Holt), who create lifelike mannequins from the bodies of members of the group, whose number includes Paris Hilton.

The heiress's stunt casting was the most discussed element of the movie at the time of its release, and she gamely handles a few obligatory in-jokes about her then-still-in-the-news sex tape before being dutifully dispatched with a rusty pole through the head. This is one of an impressive panoply of methods for the thwarting and ruination of the human body employed within the film, including the severing of an Achilles tendon with a pair of tailor's shears, the sealing of loose lips with a tube of superglue, the removal of a finger joint with a wire cutter, and various attempts to free friends from their wax entombment which go horribly wrong.

I saw *House of Wax* on its original release and, God help me, I loved it, though this was not precisely the critical consensus, and it was more than four years until Collet-Serra had a proper follow-up. In between he made

his lone Spanish feature. The second of a series of films following the exploits of Mexican footballer Santiago Muñoz as he climbs the ranks through the elite European leagues, *Goal II* is to date Collet-Serra's only sequel or franchise property, as *House of Wax* remains his only 'remake', however loose. He has since eschewed both kinds of meal tickets, instead concentrating on original properties, beginning with *Orphan* (2009).

Where *House of Wax* mostly limits its sadism to the merely physical, *Orphan* employs the same degree of ingenuity in devising new innovations in psychological torture, putting the screws to a well-to-do Connecticut couple (played by Vera Farmiga and Peter Sarsgaard) who adopt a nine-year-old Russian girl named Esther (Isabelle Fuhrman), only to discover after some bloodshed and much subtle psychic warfare that they have actually invited a mentally disturbed adult Estonian dwarf into their angular, split-level modernist home. (As in the 'House of Usher'-esque finale of his first film, Collet-Serra ends *Orphan* by literally bringing the house down.)

A work of relentless mental terrorism, *Orphan* is one of the more artfully depraved properties to hit the multiplex in ages, deserving to be mentioned in the same breath as Euro-sickies like *Who Can Kill a Child?* (1976) or *In a Glass Cage* (1986) – both also the work of cruel Spaniards. Its success rests in no small part on the wholly committed performances of Farmiga and Sarsgaard – neither at that point particularly known for genre slumming – as well as Fuhrman, a mannerly little angel in Victorian ruffles who punches across lines like, "I'll cut your hairless little prick off before you even figure out what it's for" with Soviet bloc sang-froid. Rather than resorting to off-the-rack archetype, Collet-Serra provides performers the time and space to fill out as actual characters. This quality is further evident in *Unknown* (2011), the first in an ongoing cycle of films teaming the director with Liam Neeson, which features savoury supporting turns from Frank Langella and Bruno Ganz, two old Cold Warriors briefly reunited in a new field of play.

Neeson is Dr Martin Harris, an American botanist attending a biotech conference in wintry Berlin, who wakes up from a coma after an accident to discover, haplessly, that his wife no longer recognises him, and in fact is at the conference on the arm of another man with all of the credentials of 'Dr Martin Harris'. *Unknown* establishes a pattern for the Collet-Serra/Neeson films, of which there are three to date – *The Commuter*, a fourth outing is scheduled for the autumn of 2017. Rather than reprising the actor's role as the ageless, supremely confident possessor of "a very particular set of skills" that he played in *Taken* (2007), the smash which kicked off his late career rebranding as an action star, these movies take advan-

I saw 'House of Wax' on its original release and, God help me, I loved it, though this was not precisely the critical consensus



WAXING LYRICAL
In Collet-Serra's *House of Wax* (2005), Paris Hilton (left) plays one of a group of twentysomethings who find themselves targeted by a pair of demented twin brothers who want to turn them into exhibits in their waxwork museum

tage of Neeson's bent, mournful carriage, life-battered melancholy and inherent awkward shyness. The plot of *Unknown*, which evolves into exotic cloak-and-dagger skulduggery, is built on a much more commonplace anxiety of the middle-aged male – replaced by his wife and watching her from afar, Neeson's character is as one fitted with the horns of a cuckold. (You might say that the “This is not my beautiful wife” twist in *Unknown* does for male anxiety about divorce what Joseph H. Lewis's 1945 memory-lapse thriller *My Name Is Julia Ross* did for female anxiety around marriage.)

In his next two outings for Collet-Serra, Neeson suffers from rankling regrets and a weakness for the bottle. *Non-Stop* (2014) sees him play an alcoholic ex-New York cop who's sunk to the level of air marshal – in fact a fairly privileged position in law enforcement, though plausibility isn't the film's strong suit. What it does have to recommend it is some of Collet-Serra's most spry play to date with the subjective viewpoint, from a bleary hang-over prologue to in-flight suspense as the focus ripples across the wary faces of 150 passengers on a JFK-to-Heathrow red eye, looking for a killer.

Run all Night (2015) finds Neeson fallen still further, playing an ex-Irish mob enforcer now reduced to a pants-pissing barstool sponge, who has to sober up and spend a frantic night in the light industry-and-pub districts of Queens trying to shelter his estranged son from the vengeance of his old boss (Ed Harris). A car chase through incoming traffic on Jamaica Blvd is the best since *Jack Reacher* (2012) or, well, *Unknown*, and again there is the sort of actorly detail work we've come to expect: Nick Nolte as a broken-down mama's boy who's never left the nest or apparently been to the dentist, and a wrenching dawn send-off for Harris at the orange-lit Sunnyside railyards.

COMPLETE CONTROL

The attention to unities of time and geography that mark *Run all Night* and *Non-Stop* carry on into *The Shallows*. While Collet-Serra has never had a screenwriting credit, he's evidently taken steps to control the sort of material he works with. He has remained steadily employed, thanks in part to his collaboration with Neeson, a fairly reliable box-office attraction, and to following a simple formula: genre films, made with not more than one marquee name and at a reasonable cost. *The Shallows* has, as of this writing, made three times its production budget, and most of this in the US, and only Collet-Serra's highest budgeted film, *Run all Night*, can really be said to have underperformed – though this is no reflection on its quality.

Collet-Serra's filmography is also tied together by an interest in family values, the more fucked up the better. After extraneous cast members are pruned away, *House of Wax* becomes a grudge match between two sets of twins: Bo/Vincent and the golden girl and the black sheep, played respectively by Elisha Cuthbert and Chad Michael Murray. Where *House of Wax* explicitly references Gothic sibling-rivalry classic *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, *Orphan*, an A to Z catalogue of parental terrors, is indebted to Mervyn LeRoy's problem-child picture *The Bad Seed* (1956). *Unknown* has a fraudulent marriage at its centre, while in *Non-Stop* and *Run all Night* Neeson's character is driven to drink in part at least by his failures as a father, which he is given symbolic and literal opportunity to redeem. So too is Farmiga – also playing a recov-



ering alcoholic – in *Orphan*, reborn from the water of a frozen pond in the film's finale, as Lively returns from the primordial ocean of *The Shallows*. The presiding family spirit in that film is that of Lively's character's mother, recently dead, though very present in the movie's prologue, which has Lively flipping through images of her. (As in *Non-Stop*, which pivots on text messages, Collet-Serra here proves himself one of the few directors capable of gracefully integrating ubiquitous new tech into his narratives.) The climax of *The Shallows* is a final explosion of life force dug from deep within, as in all of Collet-Serra's films – the grunted “Uh-uh” that Lively emits as she resolves to live, live, live; the last-gasp bullseye from Neeson in *Run all Night*; or Farmiga's “I'm not your fucking mommy,” which sent the crowd through the roof at the downtown Brooklyn cinema where I saw *Orphan*.

Such celebrations of never-say-die stoicism will never pass muster with the double-domes who conflate nihilism and obfuscation with cinematic sophistication. One might also say that all of the above belongs to a screenwriter's shop-worn stock of attributes for instant thematic depth, and you wouldn't be wrong – but with all old standards, it isn't the words, but the singer. Collet-Serra usually lets loose with at least one razzle-dazzle CG-augmented transitional effect per film, and he likes his God's-eye-view shots, but in general his approach is more subdued – check out how he insinuates the slow sundering of the marriage in *Orphan* with the introduction of an architect's drafting table or a corner of a hospital corridor. He has worked four times to date with director of photography Flavio Labiano, but his films without Labiano can't be said to suffer from the absence – they all show an abhorrence of flat, tension-free frames.

Alas, with *The Shallows*, even the densest critics have begun to take notice of Collet-Serra, and we can only hope he gets a chance to continue for a few more movies before some enterprising studio smothers him under an avalanche of a couple of hundred million. For as long as he is still at large and under the radar, the mid-range genre movie will be alive and kicking, and those of us who gravitate towards the pleasures of free invention and sound craftsmanship will still have something to mark our calendars by. 

 **The Shallows is released in UK cinemas on 12 August and is reviewed on page 86**

MONSTER'S BALL
A work of relentless mental terrorism, Collet-Serra's *Orphan* (2009) is one of the more artfully depraved properties to hit the multiplex in ages



RETURN OF THE REPRESSED
In *Julieta*, starring Emma Suárez (right), director Pedro Almodóvar (left) tells the story of a mother who is forced to confront the past when she hears unexpected news about her daughter, who severed all ties with her a dozen years earlier

OPEN SECRETS

Pedro Almodóvar's 20th feature, 'Julieta', explores guilt, memory, secrets and lies in an enigmatic tale adapted from a trio of short stories by Canadian author Alice Munro, about a mother trying to come to terms with her daughter's disappearance

By Maria Delgado

When we first meet Julieta, the titular protagonist of Pedro Almodóvar's 20th feature, she is middle-aged (played by Julio Medem's early muse Emma Suárez) and about to leave Madrid to live in Portugal with her partner Lorenzo (*Talk to Her's* Darío Grandinetti). But a chance encounter with Bea (Michelle Jenner), a childhood friend of Julieta's long-estranged daughter Antía, brings unexpected news of Antía's life and convinces Julieta to remain in the city. Having sought to evade her past, she realises that only by confronting it can she make sense of it, so she lets Lorenzo go to Portugal alone and begins to ponder her daughter's deliberate disappearance.

As this opening suggests, *Julieta* is a shift in gear from the slapstick register of Almodóvar's previous film, *I'm So Excited!* (2013). Where that comedy boasted self-consciously theatrical acting and farcical comings and goings – albeit within the confines of a stranded aircraft – this is an altogether sparer film, with stripped-down performances and a tangible sense of mystery. 'Silence' was the drama's original title – renamed to avoid any confusion with Scorsese's next feature – and silence is the key to both its narrative and aesthetics. *Julieta*



Spoiler alert: this feature reveals key plot details





is a film about the secrets we keep and the lies we tell to keep those secrets safe. It is also centrally concerned with how guilt can be passed on from generation to generation – through fictions, artefacts and, crucially, that which remains unsaid.

As such, *Julieta* eschews a chronological approach in favour of a more fluid sense of temporality, with different layers of the past intersecting in ways that shape the lived present. The past comes to life through remembrance. Julieta conjures her younger self (played by Adriana Ugarte) and absent daughter (Blanca Parés) through the process of writing. Moving from the minimalist flat where she had tried to airbrush her missing daughter out of her life back to the apartment block where she once shared a home with her, Julieta begins to come to terms with her grief. Authoring that process allows for explanation and atonement. Julieta, Almodóvar admits, “could well have been the protagonist of a story written by Leo, the central character of *The Flower of My Secret* [1995]”.

Key to the motif of memory is Almodóvar’s decision to have two actresses play Julieta. Suárez plays the older incarnation: fiftysomething, stylish, subdued. Ugarte plays her younger self: a bookish blonde with spiky, bleached hair who could have stepped out of Almodóvar’s *Pepi, Luci, Bom* (1980). Her fateful encounter with two men – a bespectacled stranger on a train journey who is keen to befriend her, and the Galician fisherman Xoan, who comforts her in the aftermath of the stranger’s apparent suicide – generates a guilt that engulfs her life. “Guilt,” Almodóvar admits, “travels in Julieta’s train like a kind of fatal destiny.” As the elder Julieta narrates this story, it comes to life in cinematic terms, with what the filmmaker describes as “something of the atmosphere of a fairy tale”: the blank journal page fills with writing and the screen transports the viewer to 1985, to a carriage full of scarlet seats where Julieta meets and falls pregnant by Xoan, with whom she soon begins a new life on the Ferrol estuary in Galicia.

When we first see the younger Julieta on the train she is reading Albin Lesky’s *Greek Tragedy*, an early sign that Almodóvar has fashioned his own contemporary tragedy. Julieta is a classics teacher who inspires her students to find contemporary matches for mythical characters, and she herself is identified by one pupil as the nymph Calypso, who seduced Odysseus and then sought to keep him on the island of Ogygia by granting him immortality. Her

It’s not just Spain that has changed – the world has changed, I have changed. I am more now like the mature Julieta

own emotional journey, however, resonates with that of Odysseus in Homer’s epic. Odysseus’s life takes a dramatic new trajectory after his ships are driven off course by storms, just as Julieta’s takes a fateful course after she boards the train. Xoan is a seafarer – suggesting further parallels with Odysseus – and his shrewish, soothsayer-like housekeeper Marian (Rossy de Palma, taking on the mantle of the late Chus Lampreave, who used to excel in this kind of role for Almodóvar) identifies Julieta as the wayward outsider who leaves destruction in her wake.

Almodóvar adapted the film from three short stories in Canadian author Alice Munro’s collection *Runaway*: ‘Chance’, ‘Soon’ and ‘Silence’. And while the director has said that the film has moved a long way from Munro’s stories, it is still far closer to its source material than his earlier adaptations of works by Ruth Rendell (*Live Flesh*, 1997) and Thierry Jonquet (*The Skin I Live In*, 2011). In Munro’s stories Julieta’s daughter is tellingly called Penelope – the name of Odysseus’s faithful wife. Here Almodóvar renames her Antía, but she remains as elusive as the mythical Penelope, an absent being conjured through her mother’s memories and recollections. Odysseus was away from Ithaca for 20 years, Julieta and Antía are apart for 13. Chance encounters and fateful symbols litter the film exactly in the manner of a Greek tragedy: Julieta sees Bea on the street soon after Bea spotted Antía in Lake Como. Storm clouds gather and the seas rage to foreshadow Xoan’s death as he and Julieta row over his sexual relationship with their mutual friend Ava (Inma Cuesta). Julieta’s presence as the mourning widow in black identifying the disfigured body of her beloved could be lifted from J.M. Synge’s mythic play about a fishing community in rural Ireland *Riders to the Sea*, or García Lorca’s tale of a doomed love triangle *Blood Wedding*.

Crucially, in accordance with the rules of classical tragedy, the key acts – the stranger’s suicide, Xoan’s death, Antía’s disappearance – take place off stage/screen. It is how Julieta responds to them that forms the narrative arc of the film. As in the House of Atreus, that central dynasty of Greek mythology, children are destined to repeat the mistakes of their parents. Julieta’s harsh handling of her father finds an echo in her own treatment at Antía’s hands. The guilt internalised by Antía as she confronts what she views as the complicity of Eva and Julieta in her father’s death echoes that of Elektra, who similarly blames her mother for her father’s demise. Children who are missing, dead or estranged from their parents are a familiar trope in Greek tragedy. Antía recalls Orestes – the son who avenges his father’s death in Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*. Julieta also has resonances with Euripides: the Greek dramatist similarly sought to find a way of externalising the internal conflict of his female protagonists – Andromache, Phaedra, Medea – each of whom was tormented by the fine line between reason and instinct.

“I don’t want melodrama and I don’t want tears,” Almodóvar commented last summer when I visited the set of *Julieta* in Madrid’s Barrio de las Salesas. The focus of his direction of the actors was on stripping away any unnecessary distractions – more Ingmar Bergman than Douglas Sirk. The viewer is invited to scrutinise Suárez’s face for traces of the grief contained within. Clues are sought in the demeanour of Blanca Parés’s 18-year-old Antía to explain her decision to cut off contact with her mother. The lean performances give little away. In the aftermath





of Xoan's death, Julieta moves to Madrid to begin a new life with her daughter.

Wandering the streets like a zombie, she is disconnected from what is happening around her – including her daughter's close friendship with Bea. The transformation from Ugarte's Julieta to Suárez's is realised through supple visual storytelling: Antía and Bea lift the passive Julieta out of the bath and dry her hair; when they remove the towel, one Julieta has been replaced by the other. It is as if the director has pulled off a magic trick that physicalises the passing of time.

COMING OF AGE

Indeed, *Julieta* is in many ways a film about mortality. Rossy de Palma is no longer the porcelain-skinned girlfriend immortalised in *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) but a crabby Mrs Danvers-like housekeeper with worn features and grey-flecked hair. Suárez too brings with her the ghosts of her fresh-faced roles in Julio Medem's *Vacas* (1992) *The Red Squirrel* (1993) and *Earth* (1995). Her lived-in face now shows its furrows, her hands display their age. When discussing the film, Almodóvar has evoked Philip Roth's comment that old age is not a battle but a massacre, acknowledging that the film is not a work he could have made earlier in his career. "It's not just Spain that has changed – the world has changed, I have changed. I am more now like the mature Julieta," he acknowledged to me during a recent visit to London. He refers to crippling back pain, extreme sensitivity to light, and impaired hearing in one ear, all of which have led to a greater degree of isolation and an enhanced attention to the processes and rhythms of growing old. Julieta grows into motherhood as her own

mother's dementia renders her a bedridden ghost of her former self. Beset by multiple sclerosis, Ava wastes away at a hospital – a recurring location in the director's films, a liminal space between the living and the dead where time is suspended and revelations tumble forth.

Julieta, Almodóvar admits, "isn't like the other mothers in my films, she isn't a fighter". She is in many ways his frailest maternal figure, with neither the emotional warmth of Cecilia Roth's Manuela in *All About My Mother* (1999) nor the strength of character of Penélope Cruz's Raimunda in *Volver* (2005). As grief and guilt overwhelm her, she passes them on to her daughter. In a reversal of habitual roles, it is Antía who bathes her depressed, rag doll-like mother. Repressed anger eventually drives Antía away and it is only after suffering her own terrible loss that she can break her silence and write to her mother to articulate something of what she is experiencing.

In this respect the film does share concerns that have shaped Almodóvar's output over the past decade: betrayal, mourning, loss and grief. Through them it's possible to position the director as the conscience of crisis-ridden Spain, deploying metaphors to probe the country's inability to come to terms with the culture of silence that has been built up around the crimes of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship. "Where do I begin?" Suárez's Julieta asks as she begins the process of trying to make sense of her past in a form that her absent daughter will be able to understand. This question, which haunts the film, is also clearly apposite to an austerity-ridden Spain that's riding a wave of high-profile corruption scandals, the heightened involvement of the Church in policing public behaviour, and an antagonistic right-wing government chiselling

PAST AND PRESENT
The middle-aged Julieta is played by Emma Suárez (above), while her younger incarnation is played by Adriana Ugarte (opposite, with Rossy de Palma as the soothsayer-like housekeeper Marian)

away at the hard-fought liberties of Spain's democracy. Antía's religious conversion may speak to the influence of the Church on civic life, and the narrative, although centred in Madrid, is crucially dependent on events that happen outside the capital – in Galicia, Andalusia and the Pyrenees. At a time when calls for Catalan independence threaten the fragmentation of the Spanish state, this might be viewed as a comment on the interconnectivity of the nation.

Conversations with Almodóvar return repeatedly to the state of the nation, and what he terms the "climate of great unhappiness" that Spain is experiencing. It has led him to speak out on a range of political matters from draconian eviction policies to support for the social activist groupings that led to Manuela Carmena's election as Madrid's mayor in 2015. The personal and political interlock to potent effect in *Julieta*. "It doesn't just reflect the country but my own life," he says. Its sober mood both captures and is a response to the wider malaise that has dimmed the spirit of freedom that emerged in the aftermath of Franco's death. At one point Almodóvar had considered filming the screenplay in Canada or the United States with Meryl Streep in the title role, but in the end, he says, he had to "bring it back to Spain". It was in a Spanish context that Almodóvar had first referenced the project back in 2011, in *The Skin I Live In*, when Marisa Paredes's housekeeper carries a copy of *Runaway* on a tray of food for the imprisoned Vera/Vicente. "I have a reason for the book, but I can't divulge it now," he said to me at the time. "You'll realise what it's about in the future." And it is to Spain and its customs that the film returns. "I had to adapt the three stories to Spanish culture and geography. Our family culture is very different to that of Canada or the US. There, students leave home and go to college, but in Spain they never break the umbilical cord. In Spain, family culture remains very important."

For all the "simplicity and restraint" that Almodóvar sees as a hallmark of the film, there is much to keep Almodóvar devotees content. A glorious pan of Julieta and Xoan lying side by side in the train points to a sumptuous intimacy. At one moment Julieta dresses her mother in a multicoloured dress and vintage sunglasses that hark back to Julieta Serrano's deranged mother in *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*. The colour red is a central component of the film, from the very first moments when we are confronted by a scarlet cloth. It doesn't draw back like the framing curtains of *Talk to Her* or *I'm So Excited!*, but is instead revealed to be the folds of Julieta's kimono-style wrap – the close-up suggesting an intent to probe what lies within. Red is an embodiment of the blood ties that bind her both to her mother and daughter as well as to her wider relationships. Her compatibility with Xoan, for example, is suggested by the blending of his red checked jacket with her red earrings and lipstick. But though it is associated with those Julieta loves, it also reappears constantly as a reminder of the past she cannot escape: it is the colour of the housekeeper Marian's cardigan and the kitchen wall of the flat where she has sought to erase all traces of Antía.

"I believe in repetition and rehearsal," Almodóvar says. "The human being finds himself unwittingly involved in situations which he has lived before, as if life were giving us the chance to rehearse the toughest moments before they really arrive. Julieta makes herself visible in

The sober mood in 'Julieta' both captures and is a response to the wider malaise that has dimmed the spirit of freedom that emerged in the aftermath of Franco's death

the streets and places her daughter frequented before she disappeared." It's an idea present in *All About My Mother* – in which Manuela has to give consent for her own son's heart to be donated after his death, having witnessed so many others do so in her job at the National Transplant Organisation – and one that links back both to Greek tragedy and *The Odyssey* and to Spain's questionable ability to 'let go' of its past. *Julieta* might well have been called the return of the repressed.

Film may not feature quite as pervasively as a mode of explaining his characters' actions as in earlier works, but literary tropes and texts provide a further layer of intertextual commentary. Julieta is a proofreader, her partner Lorenzo an author and art critic. When she packs for her impending move to Portugal, she gathers a collection of books she cannot be without – books, Almodóvar has acknowledged, that come from his own collection, including Marguerite Duras's *The Lover*. The walls of Julieta's flat have posters of Lucian Freud's 'Portraits' exhibition and Robert Wilson's production *The Old Woman*, which speak to a tortured inner self. A third poster references an exhibition by the artist at the heart of Víctor Erice's *The Quince Tree Sun* (1992), Antonio López, a fellow Manchegan who has also produced key Madrid artworks, including *Day and Night* and *Madrid from Torres Blancas*.

The white channel that separates the black blocks in *Reykjavik*, a 1991 painting by Richard Serra that hangs in Bea's family house, offers a startling image of the rupture in Julieta and Antía's relationship. Ava's bronze statue of a seated man – an artwork by Miquel Navarro, which is another of the director's possessions to be used in the film – embodies something of film's ability to craft and fashion new lives, something that can't easily be knocked over or pushed aside. Art provides a way of understanding and responding to the world without providing easy solutions. The end of *Julieta* does not bring closure or clear-cut resolutions but it does offer renewed hope that creative acts – as with writing and filmmaking – can offer, in the manner of the tragedies of ancient Greece, a space for articulating the temper of the times. ☺

Julieta is released in UK cinemas on 26 August and is reviewed on page 80. A season of Pedro Almodóvar's films, and films that inspired him, runs at BFI Southbank, London, until 30 September

PAINT IT BLACK
The white channel that separates the black blocks in *Reykjavik*, a 1991 painting by Richard Serra (below, behind Adriana Ugarte's Julieta), offers a startling image of the rupture in Julieta and Antía's relationship



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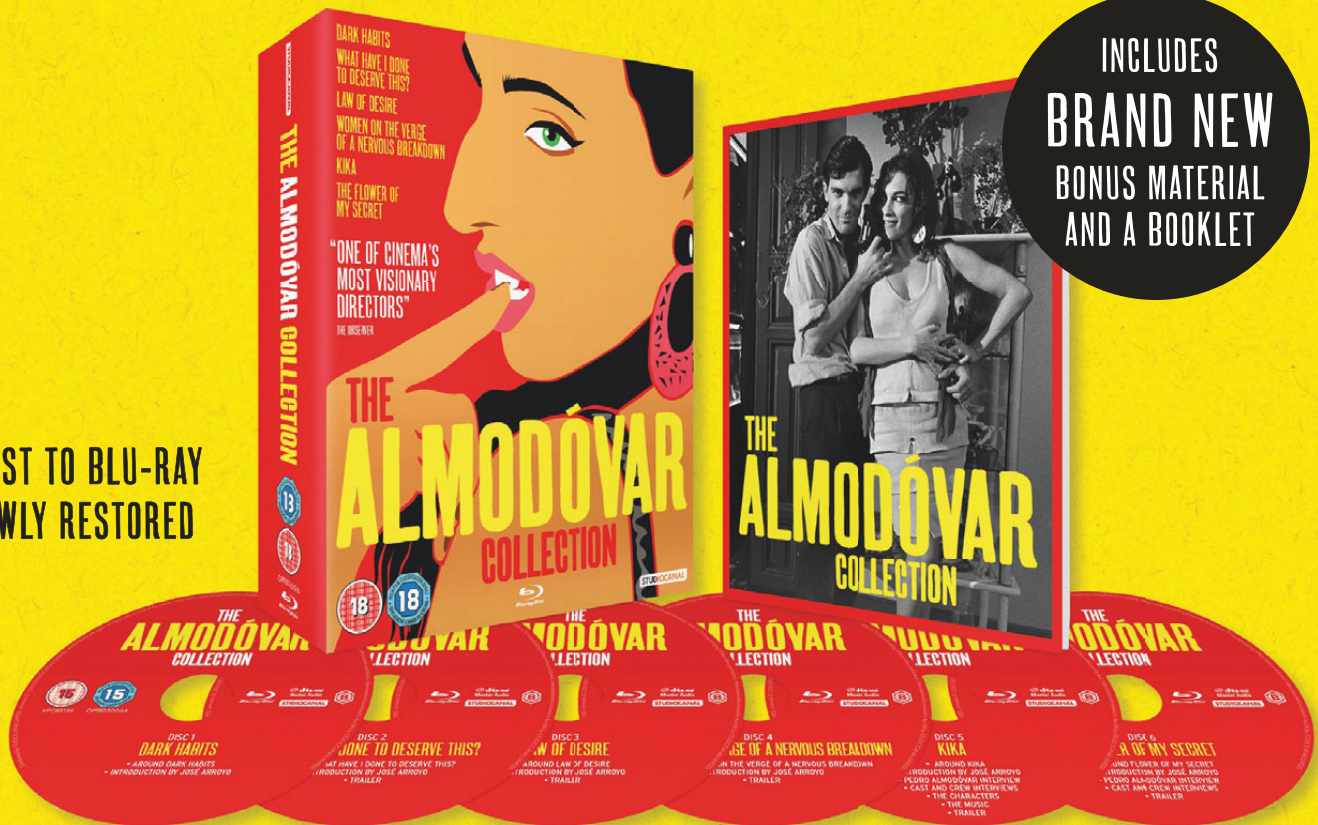
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STUDIOCANAL



LIFE'S A BITCH

Todd Solondz's 'Wiener-Dog' follows four tales loosely connected by the presence of a dachshund. But as you might expect from the master of indie misanthropy, the focus is not on the trials and triumphs of a dog in the manner of 'Lassie', but on prejudice, disaffection, ennui – and diarrhoea

By Jonathan Romney

Without wishing to offend dog lovers, you'd have to admit that a dachshund is a fairly pitiable variety of the canine species. Ears and body too long and legs too short for purpose, and compared to other breeds, inexpressive in a way that makes it very hard for humans to fondly project emotions on to it... In any case, that's true of the creature that waddles its way through Todd Solondz's *Wiener-Dog*. Not quite the film's protagonist, the beast is an elusive, enigmatic thread running through this portmanteau of episodes, the American director's latest dispassionate comic commentary on the human condition. And that condition resembles the canine one more than ever in a Solondz film; while the bottom line of this director's work has always been that life's a bitch, here he makes that point well nigh literally.

But *Wiener-Dog* is more complex and arguably less despairing than that might suggest. Simply described, the film is a set of otherwise unconnected stories about people who have a dachshund in their lives; whether it's the same dachshund is moot, since the titular hound goes by different names throughout, and there's little explanation of its passing from one owner to another. It ostensibly appears to be a sort of canine *Candide*, although the film isn't primarily about this four-legged innocent's own adventures. Rather, the animal's impassive vulnerability operates as an ironic mirror to human experience, while the humans it encounters respond to it differently, some with love, others with the casual contempt they show other humans.

The film begins with the dog, a female, in a cage at a pet shop – before switching to a human cage, the glassy modernist home of nine-year-old Remi (Keaton Nigel Cooke), who has recently survived cancer, and his stressed parents (Julie Delpy and Tracy Letts). Remi is overjoyed to

Spoiler alert: this feature reveals a key plot twist

receive the dachshund as a pet and names it 'Wiener-Dog'; but his parents are not prepared for the messiness and chaos, not to say evidence of mortality, that an animal brings (Solondz's dog not only has a digestive system but is indisputably made of flesh and blood, as shown in a spectacularly drastic payoff). The dog also prompts these bourgeois liberals to reveal their monstrous lack of empathy and horrifying prejudice, as witness the outrageous story Remi's mother tells to soothe his anxiety about Wiener-Dog being spayed. It's to protect her from male dogs, Mom says, making up a tale about her own childhood pet being raped by a dog named Mohammed (in screenings, you can hear the audience gasp).

The dog, or its identical avatar, is later adopted by veterinary worker Dawn Wiener (Greta Gerwig) – an adult version of the teenage misfit played by Heather Matarazzo in Solondz's 1995 breakthrough *Welcome to the Dollhouse*. In that film, Dawn was tauntingly named 'Wiener-Dog' by her schoolmates, one of whom, Brandon, here reappears as a somewhat more sensitive adult (Kieran Culkin). Dawn and her dog, now named Doody, join Brandon on a road trip, during which they meet a group of displaced Mexicans who offer a sour, sobering outsiders' view of the US.

The next episode concerns an ageing, weary comedy writer, Dave Schmerz (spikily played by Danny DeVito), who teaches his screenwriting students the formulaic but hardly unreasonable advice that every good story begins with the thought, "What if? Then what?" But in his own work Dave has long ago yielded to the temptation of lowest-common-denominator 'schtick', in the hope that it will sell. His students regard him as hopelessly outmoded, the sort of person who's "probably got the box-set to *Curb Your Enthusiasm*". But no one is immune to Solondz's satire, least of all the director himself; his *Storytelling* (2001) depicted a college professor and a documentary filmmaker, each as anguished as the other, and it's similarly tempting to read Dave as a version of Solondz, who himself teaches at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. The director seems also to lampoon himself in the figure of an arrogant alumnus of Dave's school, a successful indie filmmaker who gives the students some off-message advice on how to make it (the clue, Solondz has noted, is that this guy wears the same yellow Converse sneakers that are his own trademark).

Finally, the dog is seen living with an embittered elderly woman (Ellen Burstyn), who has devoted her life to art – with very little reward in the form of happiness. In a hallucinatory scene (shades of *A Christmas Carol*), she is visited by incarnations of her childhood self, who tell her what her life could have been, if only she had been more compassionate. Of course, this being a Solondz film, this doesn't ring remotely plausible. *Wiener-Dog* mocks the American myth of absolute possibility, the idea that we can all become whoever or whatever we dream of; Burstyn's Nana was surely no more likely to have achieved a joyful life than Dave's vacant students will become filmmakers simply by wishing it so. And the film closes, returning to the dog, with a gruesomely comic reminder that all flesh is, ultimately, just *stuff* – ending a narrative circuit through the human life cycle from hopeful, vulnerable childhood to old age and death.

Wiener-Dog is another profoundly experimental comedy from a director who has been playing with fragmented narrative since the multi-stranded *Happiness* (1998) and dismantling our assumptions about character since *Palindromes* (2004), in which the female protagonist was played by eight actors of different ages, genders and



faces. *Life During Wartime* (2009) was ostensibly a sequel to *Happiness*, with the same characters played by different actors. So when Dawn reappears in *Wiener-Dog*, we can't be certain that this is really Dawn from *Dollhouse* – especially since *Palindromes* began with the funeral of a character of the same name.

Such sustained indeterminacy flattens *Wiener-Dog*'s 'human interest' content, as it were, to the level of parable. The film reminds us that it's a movie through a brazenly incongruous mock 'intermission' in which Wiener-Dog trundles across the screen, sallying forth like the doggy heroes of bygone anthropomorphising entertainments such as Disney's *The Incredible Journey* (1963). The dachshund becomes a parodic embodiment of the quest for the American Dream – while, reminding us of more immediate gratifications, the audience is notified that there are "refreshments available in the lobby".

Jonathan Romney: The film's unifying thread is the dog, which you ironically present as an epic hero wandering across a continent.

Todd Solondz: If you're looking for the story of the trials and triumphs of a dog, that's not what this movie is. It's not *Lassie* or *Benji*, it's a conceit. The dog serves as a kind of prism through which all the subjects I would like to play with are explored.

At the end, obviously, when the dog is violated, that's the greatest transgression. That's the funny thing about audiences – about people in general. A cute dog is the ultimate symbol of innocence, people have a very visceral response to that. It goes beyond a woman getting raped or a family massacred – that doesn't rise to the level of a dog, a pet. It's related to the illusion of innocence, but a dog has its own yearnings and needs – it is 'dog' as much as we are 'human'. But people have such

DOG DAYS

In *Wiener-Dog* Danny DeVito (opposite) plays a weary comedy writer who teaches screenwriting, Keaton Nigel Cooke (top) plays a nine-year-old who has survived cancer, and Ellen Burstyn (above) is an embittered woman who has devoted her life to art

an anthropomorphic take. So at the end, there is a cruelty and comedy, but it's also the crushing of this innocence – this dream, this illusion we hold on to.

JR: Justifying the movies he writes, Danny DeVito's character Dave Schmerz says, "Everyone loves a little schtick."

Has that ever been a concern for you, that your distinctive signature as a filmmaker could become mere schtick?

TS: I don't know if I see myself quite that way. There are things I connect with in my life with that character – but I see him, as the students see him, as something of a dinosaur. Young people always come up to remind us of how outdated and how removed from the current reality we are. This movie is all about mortality, and that's the shadow that hovers over all of these stories. That question that Dave poses and challenges his students with...

JR: ...which is not a bad question: "What if? Then what?" But it runs the risk of becoming fossilised as schtick.

TS: Exactly. Formula is something students are often fearful of and resistant to. But there are ways that one can help someone tell a story. Dave's student says, "I want to do a movie about gender." Well, what does gender look like? What does gender want? Someone says that Dave's just an old hack and here's this young brilliant student with interesting ideas – but the irony is that he doesn't know how to tell a story, while the guy who *can* tell a story, his ideas are vacant. If they could marry each other...

JR: In one interview where you talk about teaching, you say that for you the key things are story and character. Yet your films increasingly flout expectations of story and character – for example by having different actors play the same character from film to film. Is that experimentation something you encourage your students to explore?

TS: I don't encourage them to do anything like me. This issue of alternative characters and alternative lives... I dramatise this idea with Ellen Burstyn and her lost youth, the paths not taken and so forth, in the same way that I kill Dawn in one movie and I resurrect her in the most romantic way in this one. This is something of a pleasure and prerogative for me – in recasting or resurrecting, I'm off on other trajectories, other possibilities that in our own lives we often wish we'd taken.

JR: One review called this your most extreme film. Certainly with some characters, you're really pushing their monstrousness – Remi's parents are perhaps the most terrifying characters in any of your films.

TS: Life is so much more monstrous than fiction. The scene with Julie Delpy in the bedroom is probably the only moment where you can't help but be a little bit nervous with what she says, when she says the name of that dog – that's the only thing that would make me nervous, I don't even want to say it here. In fact, people said, "Maybe you should change the name, because people get killed for this." But I feel like I'm so under the radar [laughs]. I should be so lucky – the movie would be a hit!

JR: The film begins with the dog in a cage, before we see Remi's home, which is clearly a cage itself. How do you weave these metaphors visually, and how do you work with your cinematographer Ed Lachman?

TS: I've worked with Ed before [on *Life During Wartime*] and we have a shorthand. We see something and I know what he's thinking, he knows where I am, and he pushes me. In my scripts, all I write is: "Exterior. House. Day." I don't know what I'm going to be able to get. This house actually is an architect's house. We shot a lot in tableaux,



accentuating the rigid cage that this child is living in. When I'm writing, I'm already coming in with a plan for Ed for what I see, and he gives me ideas. From the beginning, once I start writing, I'm thinking, "Where's the camera?" All that visual stuff starts with the writing.

JR: There's a line in *Wiener-Dog* about America as an "elephant drowning in a sea of despair". It's spoken by one of the Mexicans Dawn meets – the absolute image of the outsider in the US. What are your feelings on the state of America in the Trump era?

TS: I wrote the script before Trump came along, but it ended up being very timely. I've always said he's the president we deserve [laughs] – he is very much the id of the right-wing party. The establishment was much more politic, but he's saying what was always there, he's just tapping into the ugliness. I think there is good in that. Just because he is full of shit doesn't mean that when he exposes other people as full of shit, he's less full of shit himself. But he does fulfil that function of exposing others.

JR: Have you ever wanted to make a directly political film?

TS: No, that hasn't been my ambition, but I let my politics, such as it is, filter through in its own subliminal way.

JR: There's always a problem for independent filmmakers to sustain long-term careers, given the dictates of fashion. How do you feel about that?

TS: "One day you're In, the next you're Outschwitz," as [Sacha Baron-Cohen's] Brüno says.

JR: You find Brüno funny?

TS: I do. [Pause] Now you're looking at me differently. ☺

Wiener-Dog is released in UK cinemas on 12 August and is reviewed on page 93

At the end of the film, there is a cruelty and comedy, but it's also the crushing of this innocence – this dream, this illusion we hold on to

TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED *Wiener-Dog* is another profoundly experimental comedy from Todd Solondz (above), a director who has been playing with fragmented narrative since the multi-stranded *Happiness* in 1998 and dismantling our assumptions about character since *Palindromes* in 2004

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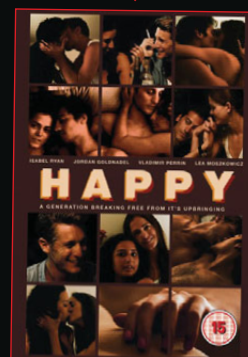
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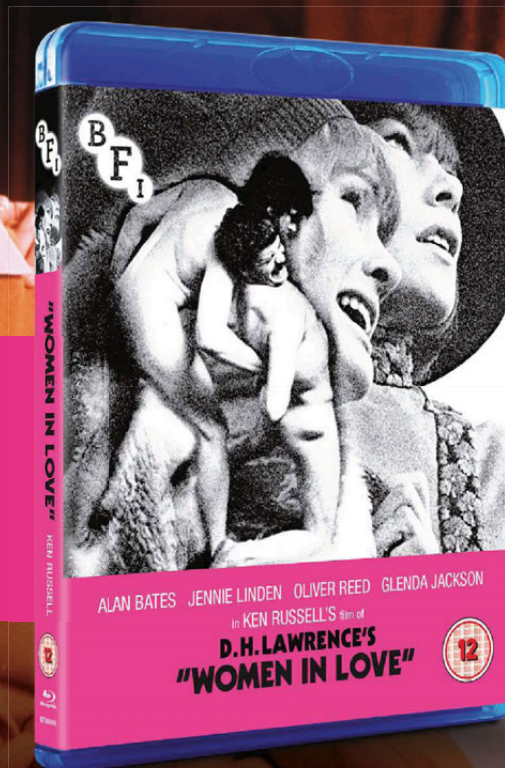
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REMEMBERING ABBAS KIAROSTAMI

To celebrate the life and work of the late Iranian director, *'Sight & Sound'* has invited tributes from a selection of filmmakers – **Víctor Erice, Shirin Neshat, Mike Leigh, Nicolas Philibert, John Akomfrah and Jim Jarmusch** – who recognised his place in the pantheon of the greats. Texts courtesy of **Geoff Andrew** with an introduction by **Nick James**

The fact that the tragic death of Abbas Kiarostami (1940–2016), on 4 July, came in the middle of a summer of political turmoil dominated by the UK's decision to leave the EU, the attempted coup in Turkey and numerous terrorist outrages, has perhaps made it harder to accommodate the shock of the news, leaving many in the film world stunned and almost disbelieving. Though there had been occasional reports for some time that Kiarostami was unwell, only subsequently did angry friends, such as fellow director Dariush Mehrjui, announce that Kiarostami himself had been misinformed by doctors in Iran, so that neither he nor his family knew the true seriousness of his condition. This only deepened the feeling of the senselessness of his passing.

What we at *Sight & Sound* knew for certain was that the prime candidate for the title of most important filmmaker of the last three decades was gone. So we wondered how best to mark his passing and to make sure his legacy would be better understood. Having published online a fine obituary by Ehsan Khoshbakht, a remem-

brance of *Close-Up* (1990) by actor and filmmaker Mania Akbari and a poignant personal memoir by regular contributor Geoff Andrew – who could count Kiarostami as a friend – we didn't want to end our commemoration there. So for this print edition we asked Geoff to round up on our behalf responses from the filmmakers he knew had most admired the great Iranian director's work.

Some who were asked were unable to respond due to issues of timing and heavy workloads; others felt Kiarostami's death too strongly to want to express their feelings. Fortunately, however, a number of friends and admirers found time to share their thoughts, and what's marvellous is that their responses show Kiarostami as an all-round artist: not only a filmmaker, but also a poet, photographer and video artist. They demonstrate the unique status of his work and underline just how irreplaceable a figure he was. We are grateful to all the contributors for their time and consideration in writing – and to Geoff for collating and in some cases translating – the tributes that follow.

YOUNG AT HEART

The experience of childhood and education were always central to the work of Abbas Kiarostami (opposite), as witnessed in his first short film *Bread and Alley* (1970, below left) and *Homework* (1989, below right)



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICOLAS GUERIN / COURTESY BY GETTY IMAGES



VICTOR ERICE

Director of *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973), *The South* (1983) and *The Quince Tree Sun* (1992)

I first encountered Abbas Kiarostami in Sicily, in July 1997, at the Taormina Film Festival. Since we were staying at the same hotel and were both early risers, it so happened that we'd be in the breakfast room at the same time. On such occasions we would have a little chat; it would be hesitant and punctuated by silences, and involve an improvised mix of English and French. Over the subsequent years, our verbal exchanges were shaped by this somewhat rudimentary form of communication. Naturally, however, it didn't shape our exchanges through images and sounds, and we found the ideal way of establishing a relationship in the ten video-letters we exchanged between April 2005 and May 2007, which became an integral part of the 'Erice-Kiarostami: Correspondences' exhibition, curated by Alain Bergala and Jordi Balló and mounted in Barcelona, Madrid and Paris.

At the time of our Sicilian sojourn, Abbas Kiarostami, who had just won the Cannes Palme d'Or for his film *Taste of Cherry* (1997), was enjoying one of the best moments of his career. I had first become acquainted with him through his work, surely the best way to get to know him. I should say that, for me, Abbas was the most important living filmmaker in the world. In Taormina he watched *The Quince Tree Sun* (aka *The Dream of Light*), which I'd made in 1992, and I believe it was that film which, far more than words, really brought us together. Afterwards, as time passed, there were meetings here and there (Madrid, Barcelona, Paris, Thessaloniki, Murcia...), not to mention our letters about anything and everything, written punctually around the dates of our birthdays; we had been born only eight days apart.

It is strange that in our conversations we hardly ever spoke about films or filmmaking, but mostly about what was happening around us, in the streets. When we visited the Prado art museum in Madrid together in July 2006, it afforded me a very good example of the kind of preferential attention Abbas would devote to things happening in real life. Though we were surrounded on every side by works of art, I had the impression that at that moment Abbas, ever restless, was more concerned with what was going on outside, beyond the museum's walls. It was an interest driven by his inborn preoccupation with the world, which for him was without distinct categories ("The world is my workshop," he would say); a preoccupation grounded in the experience of everyday life – which was the elemental subject matter of his films.

In this respect, one could say that Abbas Kiarostami was never an artist in the



Talking pictures: the 'Erice-Kiarostami: Correspondences' exhibition toured Madrid, Barcelona and Paris

For Kiarostami the fundamental task was not to manufacture beauty, but to discover it in the world and offer it up to be seen

conventional sense of being driven by a highly personal passion. Nor was he a cinephile – not, at least, in the sense that many European filmmakers of my generation were. To put it another way: during his apprentice years Abbas never went, say, to Henri Langlois's Cinémathèque Française, never signed up to the *politique des auteurs* advocated by *Cahiers du cinéma*, never followed the critical theories put forward by André Bazin. Yet we can find few artists more Bazinian than Abbas. And so it was that, at the time of his death, more than one obituary recalled a mysterious phrase uttered by that great representative of cinematic modernity, Jean-Luc Godard: "Cinema begins with D.W. Griffith and ends with Abbas Kiarostami."

Over and above its evocation of the end of an era, not to mention its trademark radicalism, Godard's assertion is a necessary reminder – artistic, philosophical and political – that Kiarostami's films were first seen in the West at the precise moment when the great utopias had been abandoned and the image was undergoing a crisis which coincided with a loss of energy. Since it burst on to our screens when film – already more than a century old – was felt to be at some kind of crossroads, it should not surprise us that Kiarostami's cinema was greeted as a breath of fresh air which might dispel the rarefied atmosphere of post-modernism.

The first Kiarostami films screened in Europe allowed us to speak of an art of the present which would establish a new, fruitfully discursive relationship between documentary and fiction; in short, it

allowed us to speak of an epiphany, a new revelation of reality. However, what we learned later about his entire creative output with its multidisciplinary dimensions – film, photography, video art, poetry and so on – soon showed that this artist was also capable of thinking of the world as if it were an abstract construction, in which we could discern signs of the rich cultural tradition of his country. This tradition, in the films he shot in his native land, seemed to be woven around a trio of relationships: one between men and women, one between death and life, one between ancient Iran and modern Iran.

In 1992, Abbas declared: "These days, a filmmaker must of necessity ask himself questions about images, and not restrict himself simply to producing them." For him the fundamental task was not to invent or manufacture beauty, but to discover it in the world; to reveal it, to offer it up to be seen. All in all, he was seeking a cinema grounded in the re-education of the gaze – a task utterly essential at a time which was notable for its enormously polluted imagery and characterised by the crisis of modernity and its aftermath: the end of metaphysics, of grand narratives, of ideologies, of humanism. Put another way, he was looking for an art not of seeing but of looking; which is to say, what the cinema was originally, but was no longer.

The car that drives around in many of Abbas's films (described by the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy as a *boîte à regard* – a watching-box) is a vehicle for a cinematic truth, out of which emerges an art of looking, sensitive to the movement of things more than to their representation. Where does that take us? We cannot possibly know. Nor, at least at the start of the journey, does the director himself know. For that is the *sine qua non* whereby what is real – and inextricably bound to the unforeseen – may become the image.

A story needs, one way or another, to come to a stop – it may even arise due to an earthquake – so that we may feel left in suspense and are hence able to see the world. This kind of suspense is of a similar kind to what is characteristic of our experience of poetry. Now is the time to say it: the gaze of Abbas Kiarostami was at each and every moment, above and beyond all other considerations, the gaze of a poet. Here is his voice, in an extract from his poetry collection *Walking with the Wind*:

“A few schoolchildren
have put their ears
on the deserted train track.”

On this abandoned siding some children are leaning over, in the hope of hearing a secret. But what secret? It is the secret of life: life and nothing more.

Translated from the Spanish by Geoff Andrew, with help from Margaret Deriaz

SHIRIN NESHAT

**Visual artist and director of
Women Without Men (2009)**

So much has been said about the life, art and passing of Abbas Kiarostami, but I will briefly share what he meant to me personally.

Let me begin by saying that I regard Kiarostami as the one who opened the doors to Iran in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution. When the image of Iran suddenly declined from a rich culture of poets and mystics into a violent and barbaric land of fanatics, Kiarostami turned his camera toward the faces and lives of Iranians, contradicting the ugly politics and religious fervour. He gave Iranians hope. His gentle, deeply philosophical and poetic lens made us understand that malice and hatred were not a part of our grain. He made us understand how historically the foundation of who we are as Iranians has been about seeking spiritual reflection in times of political crisis; to turn towards creative imagination to surpass injustice and dictatorships. His poetic and philosophical constitution lands him next to other Iranian treasures: Rumi, Khayyam, Saadi, Hafiz, Forough Farrokhzad and Sohrab Sepehri.

In cinema Kiarostami pioneered a new form that was minimal and poetic, humanistic yet deeply subversive, transcending the codes of censorship. Many other Iranian filmmakers tried to follow in his footsteps but what distinguished Kiarostami was his refusal to remain local and his refusal to simply feed Western curiosity. He had the rare ability to tell stories which were ethnically specific yet fully universal, contemporary but utterly timeless. He influenced thousands of filmmakers across the world. His methodology has shown the value of simplicity and modesty.

Though a nomad who journeyed



Love among the ruins: *Through the Olive Trees* (1994) is the third part of a trilogy set in northern Iran

exhaustively across the world, Kiarostami never chose a life in exile. His heart was deeply rooted in the fabric of Iranian culture. Therefore, despite his country's shortcomings, leaving Iran was never an option. Yet his work was never entirely appreciated at home, possibly because many films were not made available to the general public.

There is a tragedy in the story of a man who passionately loved and served his country but was poorly treated and hardly acknowledged there until he died. What is remarkable is that Kiarostami was never an angry man... as long as he could continue making art and films and writing poetry.

I recall the last time I saw him, nearly two years ago in Vienna. We spent hours walking around. While constantly taking photographs, he told me about a new film he was planning in China; about his upcoming photographic exhibition in Canada; about his new photography and video installation series. All I could think at the time was: Kiarostami is still such a young artist, and truly thriving.

Let me end by saying that what Kiarostami has left behind for me is beyond his art, beyond his international status. What stays with me is the virtue of his character, his humanity, his humility, and most of all his remaining uncompromisingly an individual like no other.



Close-Up (1990)

MIKE LEIGH

**Director of *Life Is Sweet* (1990),
Naked (1993) and *Mr. Turner* (2014)**

The untimely death of Abbas Kiarostami is a truly dreadful loss. The cleverest, subtlest, the most profound of us all. A sweet, generous soul. He invited me to join him in a public conversation at the Victoria & Albert Museum in 2005. We talked about each other's films, showed clips and shared thoughts. Now, as then, I find it nearly impossible to cite any one of his masterpieces as the best. But *Ten* (2002) has to be one of the most deceptively brilliant films of all time.

The premise seems extraordinarily simple. Ten scenes, each with two characters, shot entirely from the dashboard position of an ordinary saloon car on the move around the streets of Tehran. Matching reverse mid-shots, the dialogue seemingly improvised. Mostly we cut between both protagonists, although in some sequences we hold on one, and don't see the other. The action takes place at various times of the day and night, over an unspecified period; is it a year? More? Less?

The driver – the central character – is a young professional woman, a mother and a divorcee. Her passengers are her intelligent pre-adolescent son, her world-weary sister, a pious and superstitious old lady, a raucous but honest prostitute, a young woman ex-non-believer dealing with the conclusion of her engagement, and another young woman, bereft at the collapse of her marriage.

There are short interchanges with other motorists and pedestrians, all men, and the briefest glimpses of the ex-husband, in his car as the son is handed over.

Every second of this economic but expansive film's 92 minutes is compelling and watchable. Even passages such as when the sister is just sitting waiting – a non-event dramatically by any normal standards – have you spellbound.



← Abbas's genius is that within the framework of these ten encounters, not only do we learn everything about these people and their world, and about the other folk in their lives, but we come to understand them, and to care about them. The main character evolves from apparent simplicity to real complexity, progressing from helpless weakness to confident strength and sophistication.

But what places *Ten* up there with the greatest dramatic and political cinema is that, through these diverse interchanges, which span the entire tragicomic spectrum, he makes us reflect on marriage, divorce, relationships and parenthood; on the independence and the subordination of women and their role in society; and on sex, love, boyhood, faith, superstition, truthfulness and much else.

As filmmaking, *Ten* is remarkable. It is impeccably acted, shot, recorded and edited. It is an epic family drama and a portrait of a bustling, modern city. But above all, it is a great radical feminist film. Lest we forget it, Abbas spent a lifetime dodging censorship to find ways to tell his human stories. And here he does it spectacularly.

NICOLAS PHILIBERT

Director of *Etre et avoir* (2002), *Nénette* (2010) and *La Maison de la radio* (2012)

For me, Abbas Kiarostami was one of the greatest.

I should invoke the titles of his films, as beautiful as those of Ozu.

I should speak of the poetry of his art, at work in the landscapes he would film: those steep paths zigzagging down hillsides, those fields of wheat undulating in the wind...

I should speak of the bravery of his decision to remain in Iran after the revolution, and of his desire to continue making films there among his own people.

I should speak of the fragility of life, a theme so often present in his work, and of the existential bond which unites life and death.

I should speak of the sharpness with which he interwove documentary and fiction, making them coexist; and of the pleasure he derived from having non-professionals act; of his pronounced preference for the simplest of stories, linked to an acute dramaturgical sensibility.

I should speak of the obstinacy with which he never ceased to examine the links between cinema and life, truth and falsehood, good and bad.

I should speak of the dazzling way he had of making some of his films resonate with others. I'm thinking especially of *Life, and Nothing More...* (1992) and *Through the Olive Trees* (1994), each of which, following *Where Is the Friend's House?* (1987), revisits an



Mania Akbari in *Ten* (2002)

aspect of the preceding film by means of a *mise en abyme* of the most stimulating kind.

And already, from all his films, there is one which I dream of revisiting. It is *Homework* (1989), a film that's a little different from the others, even though the themes of childhood and education were always an abiding concern for him. Speaking straight to camera, schoolchildren are asked about the heavy burden of their homework, its unfortunate coinciding with the cartoons playing on television, and the punishment that it can give rise to. Kiarostami, who interviews the children, finds that all they know is the punishment and that they receive no encouragement or support. The film blew me away. As always, Kiarostami had excelled in the art of telling us a great deal with very little. *Translated from the French by Geoff Andrew*

JOHN AKOMFRAH

Director of *Handsworth Songs* (1986), *The Nine Muses* (2010) and *The Stuart Hall Project* (2013)

Three reveries on Abbas Kiarostami...

Sometime in the late 80s, at a time when we should have been better informed about Iranian cinema, requests for copies of our films started to arrive at the Black Audio Film Collective offices from an organisation in Tehran called the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. The requests seemed so surreal that we simply ignored them.

I remember the film that made us realise our mistake: Kiarostami's magisterial *Close-Up*. I remember the force and clarity with which its form impressed, the assuredness of its justly famous traffic between actuality and fiction. And I remember leaving a festival screening feeling that sense of having had one of those extraordinarily defining experiences of life.

I cried when Kiarostami's death was announced. It brought to mind something which Sabzian – the erudite identity thief

Many of us felt reborn after watching 'Close-Up'. We sensed Kiarostami had gifted us a road map of cinema's possible future



Taste of Cherry (1997)

whose trial forms the centrepiece of *Close-Up* – once said: "With every good film I see, I feel reborn." Many of us felt reborn after *Close-Up*. We sensed that Kiarostami had gifted us something not only singularly responsible for recalibrating our sense of a country, but also a road map of cinema's possible future. And that is why I cried when Kiarostami died.

JIM JARMUSCH

Director of *Down by Law* (1986), *Dead Man* (1995) and *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013)

Abbas Kiarostami, one of my very favourite filmmakers, was also a painter, a photographer and a wonderful poet (publishing six volumes of his beautiful haiku). His death was unexpected and hit me hard. I have been looking toward him, as though toward an illuminated window, with expectations of more remarkable work. I learned (via Mark Cousins's *The Story of Film*) that Jean Cocteau said that there was cinema before and after Abel Gance. I think I would substitute the name Abbas Kiarostami.

I remember seeing his first film, *Bread and Alley* (1970), years ago on a bootleg VHS tape, and being moved by its Keatonesque simplicity and perfect reduction of the world: a young boy (five, maybe six years old) must navigate his way home through the back alleyways of the city, bringing home bread, and daunted by the presence of an aggressive and unpredictable dog. The world is reduced to these few alleys, and the perception of it to one small boy with a mundane but important mission. Ten minutes. Black and white. The very first work of a great film artist. I watched this film again the day after I learned of Kiarostami's death, and now I will immerse myself in all his films – in those I've never seen as well as those I have.

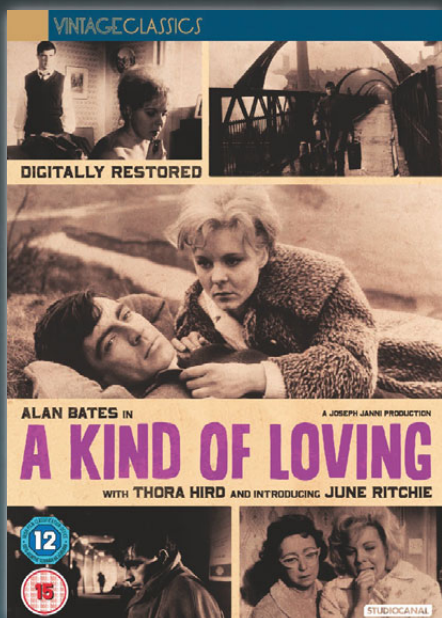
I was so lucky to meet Abbas on several occasions. He was quietly alert, funny and inspiring. Though he's physically gone from us too soon, we are so extremely lucky to have his extraordinary body of work, and his particular perspectives on being human in this far-from-perfect world. R.I.P. Abbas Kiarostami. We will remember you until the snow no longer falls, the olive trees no longer bloom, and the wind will no longer carry us... ☹

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STUDIOCANAL

PROFILE

TRAGIC HEROINES, COMIC CUTS

The characters inhabiting Lewis Klahr's animated films are literally two-dimensional cartoons – yet filled with human feeling

By Adam Nayman

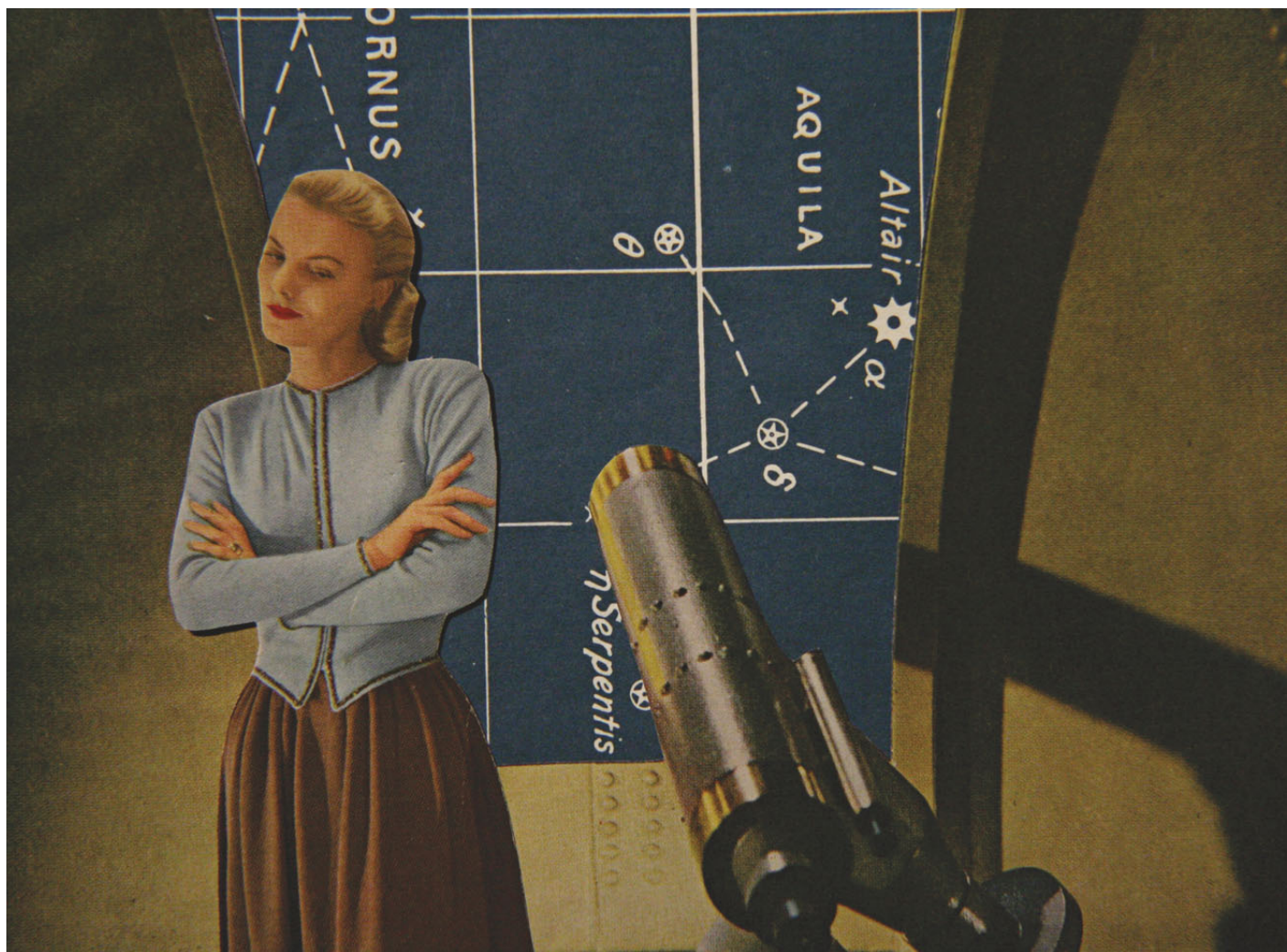
The title of the American experimental filmmaker Lewis Klahr's recent anthology work *Sixty Six* (2015) is nominally almost demonic – two-thirds of the way to a very bad omen. But the film's constellation of gods and monsters stretches above and beyond God and the Devil. Comprising 12 shorts of varying lengths, all produced since 2002, each set in a different month in 1966, the film is filled with allusions to Greek mythology, from the fleet-footed messenger Mercury to the quietly murmuring waters of the river Lethe.

These ancient figures and places are represented metaphorically by the forlorn cut-out figures tottering through moody, shifting virtual landscapes of print and photographic ephemera. Over five decades, since he started

work in 1977, Klahr has been using these woe-begone cartoons as the dramatis personae of his collaged animations. The format has changed: having previously worked in the ragged environment of 16mm, Klahr shot each of the films in *Sixty Six* digitally. Still, despite the technological update, the overall impression is of an intense but ambivalent nostalgia for a bygone age. Call it *Paradise Lost*.

In an interview with Jordan Cronk for *Cinema Scope* (conducted for the magazine's 66th issue), Klahr explained his consistent artistic attraction to a period that might be defined as the space between post-war and pop art. "My relationship to it keeps changing," said the director when asked if he felt a special kinship with the 1960s. "At first, in my twenties, it arose as a nostalgia for that period, a desire to relive it, or live inside it imaginatively as a young adult, since I'd only lived in it as a child... as collage is my main medium of expression, the source materials I deal with are older. They have a certain freedom because they're outmoded... it's been 50 years since 1966, and that period now feels mythological."

Klahr – who teaches at CalArts in Los Angeles – has been a steady presence at experimental and avant-garde film festivals since the early 1980s and in 1994 was given a special citation for experimental work by the National Society of Film Critics: he surely does not lack for critical champions. Other American experimental filmmakers before him have explicitly mythologised the past: the critic and curator Chris Stults has pointed out the connection between Klahr's films and the work of earlier post-modernists such as Bruce Conner and Kenneth Anger, from their shared love of associational montage to the deployment of pop music as a kind of Greek chorus (although Klahr also finds space for classical pieces, including some soaring passages by Mahler, in *Sixty Six*). Klahr's bricolage aesthetic is at once glancingly impressionistic – all flitting shapes and hurtling word balloons – and authentically, concretely of the era it means to evoke. What differentiates him from other practitioners in his field is that in addition to his distinctive (and readily theorised) MO, which emphasises the



Constellation of genius: Lewis Klahr's *Altair* (1995), which demonstrates his 'eye for airbrushed anguish'

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physicality of his materials, he's also a deceptively skilled dramatist, especially considering that the players in his miniaturised melodramas are typically bewildered refugees from forgotten comic-books. Features frozen in either thin smiles or exaggerated expressions of distress, they make for strangely vivid protagonists.

Sixty Six is populated exclusively by such stock figures, from scheming criminals to mad scientists, stranded in a vaguely paranoid California that will be cosily familiar to readers of Thomas Pynchon; it could be said that Klahr's invariably tortured characters are victims of their own inherent vices. Some of these ciphers recur between episodes (evidence of the interconnectedness of the project) while others have standalone, star qualities. In the sublime 'Helen of T', the third of the 12 episodes, a blithe blonde goddess careers inexorably into middle-age, a transition made all the more painful by her identity as a (literal) poster girl for youth and beauty. As the face that launched 1,000 ships abruptly shifts into middle-age, Klahr burrows inside its owner's melancholy.

In a collection obsessed with transfiguration – and, in the concluding, sci-fi-inspired 'Lethe', the tantalising but thwarted possibility of eternal youth – her ordeal resonates. Helen's plight also has some of the same creepy-playful charge as Todd Haynes's Karen Carpenter biopic *Superstar* (1987), with its cast of Barbie dolls. Haynes has much in common with Klahr, who similarly takes tonal and textural inspiration from the tragic Technicolor suburban fantasies of Douglas Sirk. Indeed, some of Klahr's best shorts feel like miniaturised Sirk movies – vividly coloured, pocket-sized melodramas.

Klahr has an eye for airbrushed anguish; in the amazing *Altair* (1995), he uses bits and pieces of mid-20th-century *Cosmopolitan* advertisements to critique beauty myths, showing an array of female 'types' in thrall to their own visual exploitation. Like Sirk's heroines, or Julianne Moore in Haynes's *Far from Heaven* (2002), they're trapped by mindset as much as circumstance. At one point Klahr focuses on a Queen of Diamonds playing card (playing cards being one of his favourite motifs) as several of the women fall asleep – a reference to *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) slyly implying that the girls are hypnotised, and an acknowledgment by the director of his own suggestively dreamlike practice.

James Dean and Marilyn Monroe can be glimpsed within *Altair*'s series of swirling, kaleidoscopic, super-impositions – like Andy Warhol, Klahr understands the value of celebrity cameos. But Klahr isn't just into enshrining icons: he actively deconstructs them as well. 1997's *Pony Glass*, probably Klahr's most famous standalone short, is fully focused on a specific, familiar character from American pop culture – Jimmy Olsen, the intrepid *Daily Planet* photographer who shadowed Superman on many of his adventures. Klahr's choice of Olsen as a model reverberates beyond brand-name appeal, however; *Pony Glass* gains resonance not only from shoving a perpetual sidekick into the spotlight but also by suggesting that the boy reporter's gee-whiz innocence – a staple of his character since the comic's 1930s origins – masked urgent desires.



The face that launched 1,000 ships: 'Helen of T', the third part of Lewis Klahr's *Sixty Six*

There's potential here for smirking immaturity, and Klahr doesn't take the bait. Far from a simple, winking 'subversion' of its source material, *Pony Glass* feels like an empathetic expansion of the Superman universe and its core themes of alienation, masculinity and, most of all, secret identities. With each of its three sections pegged to a particular song (including Frank Sinatra's haunting rendition of Gordon Jenkins's 'Goodbye', with its yearning lyrics), *Pony Glass* has the plangent emotionalism and, it should be said, happy ending of a classic musical. The dry, nervy jazz melodies encircling Klahr's *The Pettifogger* (2011), the story of a gambler watching his life unravel, set in 1963, are as central to its effect as any of the images.

Described by its maker as an "abstract crime film" – one in which narrative is implied rather than explicated – *The Pettifogger* was compared by several critics to *Mad Men*. Though that juxtaposition may say more about our current hyped-up frame of cultural reference than Klahr's intentions, the protagonist is a hard-drinking, womanising rogue in thrall to his own appetites – an analogue to Jon Hamm's iconic confidence man Don Draper. The Pettifogger himself is represented by a comic-book rendering of Robert Vaughn, the original *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* – a link to the suave-spy vogue of the early 60s (which may be why when I saw it I thought of *Archer*, the retro animated spy show on the Adult Swim cable network). However, there is no glamour in the character's downward spiral, and the sense of decay is heightened by the presence of actual objects and props

Some of Klahr's best shorts feel like miniaturised Douglas Sirk movies – vividly coloured, pocket-sized melodramas

from the period, whether in old photographs or physically placed within the frame.

At 65 minutes, *The Pettifogger* tests whether Klahr's aesthetic can work at feature length. It works, but *Sixty Six*'s episodic structure probably suits him better, since – as with many other symbolically minded filmmakers – the images gain power from being fleeting. In 'Ambrosia', the aftermath of what seems to be a wedding banquet is rendered in impossibly tactile detail – black-and-white tableaux describing the impermanence of experiences. One of the most fascinating aspects of *Sixty Six* is the rigour with which Klahr differentiates between his filmed objects – which tend to be 'real' – and his characters, who are doomed to exist only in two dimensions and can never really interact with their environments, just exist over the top of them. A Roy Lichtenstein print is present in 'Helen of T' not just to pay homage, but as an emblem of a methodology that imbues wholly artificial characters with familiar existential anxieties.

Like the drowning girl of Lichtenstein's 1963 painting – who would rather sink than call her boyfriend Brad for help – Klahr's lonely caricatures are by turns bewildered and resolute; if never quite heroic, they nevertheless engage our sympathies even when the text relating their thoughts is rendered illegible. And while there's always a degree of comedy built into the presentation – a lot of *Sixty Six* is very funny – it's rarely of a simply mocking or hectoring variety.

What's odd about these movies without people is how humane they finally feel, and how their scattered elements of autobiography (many of the photographs are taken from the director's own family albums) are layered within the semiotic gamesmanship. Between its 14-year production period (two years longer than Richard Linklater's *Boyhood*) and endless shots of clocks, *Sixty Six* is a film that nobly, quixotically keeps regaining time, only to lose it again.

SILENT HARMONIES

When it comes to choosing music to accompany a silent film, the possibilities are endless – and so are the possibilities for getting it wrong

By Pamela Hutchinson

In David Thomson's latest book *How to Watch a Movie* he suggests a little experiment, one that may horrify a silent film aficionado. To illustrate music's contribution to the cinematic experience, he suggests watching the "Couldn't she get drowned?" sequence from *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* (1927) five times. Once, while playing Frank Sinatra singing 'I've Got You Under My Skin'; again, accompanied by a snatch of Debussy's *La Mer*; next with Donna Summer's 'Love to Love You Baby'; then with the opening of the last movement of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony; and finally with a raga played by Ravi Shankar on the sitar.

Unless you are the sort of viewer who synchronises Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* with *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) to test the urban legend that the two are perfectly aligned, you may want to take Thomson's word for it. According to him, at least, that woozy, mysterious sequence holds its own against all comers. "That range is comic," he concludes, "but they all work." The film is not ruined, but its meanings shift. The same scene becomes camp, lyrical or sexy by turn. Thomson next imagines the scene playing out with ambient sound effects: wind in the trees or cicadas chirping in the swamp. That apparently literal approach to sound could seduce us into the pathetic fallacy, evoking the heat of the summer night to suggest the lovers' passion, or an ill wind rustling the leaves. And yet most of us, accustomed to film soundtracks being part of the filmmaker's design – that is to say, commissioned, arranged and edited along with the images – shudder to think that we should be allowed to play fast and loose with the meaning of a movie. Perhaps we are frightened by the thought that the spell of a favourite scene or sequence is so fragile, it could be broken by Sinatra or Debussy.



Orchestral manoeuvres in the dark: Abel Gance's *Napoleon*, screened with a live score in London in 1984

With silent cinema, while we have to accept that sound and image are quite separate, scores can often become a bone of contention. Early audiences may well have been more relaxed. "The film experience in the silent days was made up of two principal components, picture and music, which were supplied by different people: the film from the studio and music from the exhibitor," explains Bryony Dixon, the BFI's curator of silent film. "We are so used to the soundtrack being an integral part of the film that this concept seems strange, but the music played to a silent film, with the exception of some commissioned scores for major premieres, was arranged by the band leader attached to a cinema. So silent film music has always varied from screening to screening." And Thomson's 'jukebox' method has a precedent too. "The band leader would have a personal music library from which to assemble an accompaniment," Dixon says.

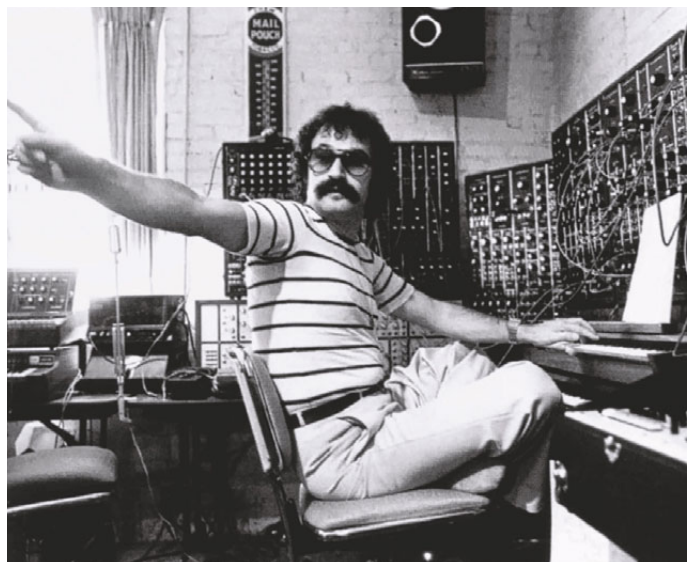
That idea that the soundtrack is fully part of the film is hard for modern audiences to shift,

Experimentation with silent film music is more palatable in theory than in practice, when it is often best left to the experts

so deviations from the expected norm can be unwelcome. Try spinning Donna Summer alongside Murnau at a public screening and the squeals of protest might drown out the disco beats. When Summer's producer Giorgio Moroder soundtracked (and restored) Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) in the 1980s, the film found favour with a wide audience who had never seen it with any other kind of music. Now, that particular restoration polarises cinema buffs, and by and large aficionados expect a more reverent approach to silent film music. Thomson's own theory is that the visible labour of a live musical accompaniment distracts audiences; he prefers "the magic of a musical score that arose in the air



F.W. Murnau's *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans*



Music producer Giorgio Moroder wrote a new *Metropolis* score in the 1980s

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA



At Bologna's annual festival, it is possible to feel connected to the whole world – and especially to the past

By Bryony Dixon

For a Brit still stunned by the referendum vote, Il Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna offered a week-long retreat – an event that is all about making connections rather than cutting ties. This gloriously inclusive festival, a vast programme of 500 films in eight days, has a programming culture that seeks out the different, connects the unconnected and encourages movement across boundaries – between national cinemas, genres, sound and silent film, fiction and non-fiction, popular and non-mainstream films.

The startling range of films in this festival is difficult to grasp in one go – an hour or so spent perusing the catalogue pays dividends. Indeed, the catalogue has gone from being one of the worst on the international festival circuit to one of the best, though it now weighs more than broken hearts. This year it was divided into four sections that reflected the programming ethos – 'The Time Machine', which connected chronologically; 'The Space Machine', which gathered films from around the world; 'The Cinephiles' Heaven', which rediscovered the classics and also took in public and children's screenings in the city; and 'Not Only Films', a category that included a host of seminars, conferences, Europa Cinemas and this year's congress and summer school of the International Federation of Film Archives.

Through the blur of screenings, conversations and events of a busy festival, themes emerge. One theme that caught my attention here was the permeability of borders and boundaries – sparked by an unusual Swiss film, *The Last Chance* (*Die letzte Chance*), made just before the end of World War II, which follows two soldiers, one British and one American, trying to get through German-occupied Italy to Switzerland. Along the way they fall in with a mixed group of would-be immigrants who have been wandering Europe for a decade. The questions asked here, about the ethics of closing borders to immigrants or refugees, resonate strongly today. *Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre* (1959), a recently restored Belgian film, tackled immigration from another angle, taking as its subject a programme of migration from Italy to Belgium's heavy industrial areas, trading labourers for coal, which far from offering the immigrants opportunity locked them into an exploitative, segregated world.

There were, mercifully, happier journeys into the past. To celebrate its 30th year the festival rebooted its 'Cento anni fa' ('100 years ago') strand, this time going back 120 years. '1896, Year One of Cinematography' grouped a selection of films from that year

A film of children fishing for shrimps at the English seaside punches a hole in time



Alexandre Promio's *Children Fishing for Shrimp*

into themes – films of a particular place, of a particular type (panoramas, actualities, films of things that move in an interesting way), hand-coloured fairground films, films of long-forgotten pleasures and work practices, films by a particular Lumière operator on his travels. Such creative programming of short early films is hugely enjoyable to do and to watch: I can't wait to contribute to this fantastic new strand – perfectly timed as a prelude to the BFI's new project on Victorian film, which will involve digitising every surviving British film made between 1895 and 1901.

The 1896 programme was also timed to accompany 'Lumière! the Invention of the Cinema', an ambitious exhibition curated by Thierry Frémaux, director of the Cannes Film Festival and head of the Institut Lumière in Lyon. The exhibition tells the story of the Lumière company's astonishing inventiveness and its contribution to photography, which included colour and instant photos, 360 panoramas and 3D as well as cinematography. It is mounted in an old underpass below Bologna's Piazza Maggiore, making good use of the unusual space with an immersive installation showing hundreds of Lumière views on the walls of a long corridor and, at the end, a projection on to a curtain of the *Arrivée d'un train en gare de Ciotat* coming straight at you – so that you walk through this to the exit. Very cool.

Most illuminating for me was the focus on the 23 operators trained by Louis Lumière after the success of the Lumières' famous first screening in Paris in December 1895. These operators took the cameras and films all around the world, finding exhibitor partners and training local cameramen to shoot new films. London was one of the first ports of call: the films that Alexandre Promio shot there in 1896 are glorious. The short he made of children fishing for shrimps at the English seaside is one of those that punch a hole in time.

Mariann Lewinsky's note describes perfectly how some films transcend time: "They behave in many different ways... a flag flying, for instance, crosses over easily and reaches the present... while a Tsar or a dowager Empress of Russia remains bound to the past, animals and children are free, timeless. The uncanny magic of time in these very early films is overwhelming. How is it possible that we should be permitted to see the past, in 50-second glimpses?"

without labour or strain, and was as essential and inexplicable as the light show itself". However, for many others, including myself, the attraction of a ciné-concert is the combination of live and recorded entertainment, with the music giving the film an extra frisson. There is a small but substantial group of specialists who have made careers of improvising or orchestrating scores for silent film, and their expertise results in sensitive, melodic and nimble soundtracks. But their ranks are often swelled by newcomers – and woe betide the novice who dares to break the unspoken rules of silent film accompaniment.

There should only be one cardinal sin for a silent film score: that it ignores the pace and mood of the visual action. That's it. A beautiful melody is nice, but not strictly essential. However, the following foibles have all caused people I know to rant and rage and even to walk out of screenings: the use of anachronistic musical instruments, genres or quotations; diegetic sound effects (close-up of telephone prompts a bell to tinkle); comical sound effects (the penny-whistle pratfall); lyrics, whether used to narrate the film or to sing about something entirely different; literal musical quotations ('Happy Birthday' every time some candles are blown out); a pipe organ. Perhaps it is unnecessary to say that I can counter each accusation with an example of the same technique being used to brilliant effect. Rules are made to be broken, after all. And when I ran a short, unscientific poll on the @SilentLondon Twitter account, playing too fast or slow for a film came last on a list of "sins" led emphatically by votes for "techno".

When a film is finished without a score, as silent films often are and were, we have no real knowledge of what the director expected music to contribute. But experimentation with silent film music is more palatable in theory than in practice, when it is often best left to the experts. It can be painful when the music for a live screening or the score recorded for a new Blu-ray is a disappointment, especially if it is a rare chance to see that film or the price of the ticket or the disc was especially high. At home, it seems a shame to watch a film in silence, so if the score is unacceptable I'll often mute it and try a little Thomson-esque experiment of my own. The difference between watching with music, whatever it may be, or without often feels more like the difference between watching a film in a crowd or alone, as in an archive. Perhaps when we embrace or reject a new score, we are not just choosing the meaning we want to take from the film, but the company we'd like to keep.

As for *Sunrise*, it's a film I have often heard played live beautifully. On those occasions I have been conscious not just that I am enjoying the music, but that it adds a new layer of meaning to the film, and that I am part of an audience simultaneously impressed by the skill of long-gone film-makers and a very present musician. Frank Sinatra can bide his time – not least because *Sunrise* has a soundtrack of its very own, a compilation of music by Hugo Riesenfeld and sound effects, added for its American release using Fox's optical Movietone system. Personally, I have never much liked it. Perhaps I am not as old-fashioned, or as much of a purist, as I thought. ☺

SEXY BEASTS

Helsinki's Viva Erotica festival celebrates sex on film in all its variety – hardcore, softcore and conceptual-experimental

By Saskia Vogel

If you wander far enough north, the locals will be full of tales about tourists who have visited with only one thing on their minds – the effect of the midnight sun, or the northern lights. So it is no surprise that it was in the wilds of Finnish Lapland that Viva Erotica, Helsinki's annual festival celebrating the history of sex on screen, was conceived, when Milja Mikkola, programme manager at the Midnight Sun Film Festival, met Olaf Möller, a film critic and professor of film history at Aalto University in Helsinki.

The first edition of this 'Splendid Movie Orgy', held in May 2015, wrapped the audience in a giddy fog of cheer and arousal. This year's four-night programme was more demanding, with a number of more experimental films and, at times, a more conceptual engagement with sex. Nonetheless, each of the 13 screenings was a rewarding fling.

The festival opened with an evening entitled 'Dem Dirty Danes'. The first screening was Knud Leif Thomsen's *Venom* (1966) – exploring the anxieties of the turning of the moral tide, the horror of which is represented by a teenage daughter's liberated (read: sociopathic) boyfriend. Unfortunately, proceedings were held up when the film melted in the projector – one of the hazards of a festival with a strong bias towards movies shot on film and available to screen in their original formats. But Viva Erotica is not about nostalgia: instead, it wants the audience to examine its role as spectator, to ask questions such as: when a film isn't meant to get you off or doesn't turn you on, what do we want from sex as a cinematic subject? Is it inevitable that we will become inured to sensation?

Jack Stevenson, proprietor of Husets Biograf, a cinema in Copenhagen, illuminated the social and political currents of late 60s Denmark, when censorship was abandoned. People would fly across the world to watch a skin flick on the big screen in Denmark and perhaps, just perhaps, be the lucky spectator at a live sex club who is chosen to be wanked off in front of the rest of the audience. That scenario is taken from Werner M. Lenz's documentary *Facts: Copenhagen Sex Report* (1971), excerpts from which were screened along with a set of 16mm stag films produced by the Copenhagen porn studio Color Climax – steamy, impressionistic hardcore that made today's straightforward 'gonzo' porn seem clinical.

On the second night, Möller treated us to one of his passions: *pinku eiga*, Japanese softcore erotica, which he is drawn to less for titillation than for the way it pushes the boundaries of cinematic art. Directors follow strict guidelines – shoot an hour-long film with at least five sex scenes in one week on a tiny budget – but within those limits they have creative freedom. *Tokyo X Erotica* (Zeze Takahisa, 2001) explored Buddhism and sex in relation to *la petite mort*, while ruminating on the terrors of existence, including the Tiananmen



Woman of the dunes: Knud Leif Thomsen's *Venom* (1966)

Square massacre and the 1995 Tokyo subway gas attack. Though striking, its fragmented aesthetic made it hard to watch. Imaoka Shinji's *Underwater Love* (2011), a kooky, charming love-story-cum-musical about a mythical turtle creature, was a welcome palate cleanser before *An Aria on Gazes* (Sato Hisayasu, 1992). This fever dream involves a troubled marriage, murder, the sedative Halcion and a sex-club called The Sleeping Room where men act out their fantasies on women: you can get some sense of the film's darker edges from the fact that one customer is played by Sagawa Issei, who in Paris in 1981 murdered and cannibalised a woman.

On Saturday night the director Peter Strickland introduced two films he said he had been longing to share: Ethan Reid's wonderful 2014 documentary *Peter de Rome: The Grandfather of Gay Porn* and Monika Treut and Elfi Mikesch's *Seduction: The Cruel Woman* (1986). He also showed Cleo Übelmann's *Mano Destra* (1986), a Mapplethorpean study of a domina and her submissive (client? girlfriend? herself?) which Strickland has cited as an inspiration for *The Duke of Burgundy* (2014), though Übelmann's stark, almost frozen shots couldn't be more different to *The Duke's* lush milieu.

James Herbert's films induce melancholy – knowing that innocence will be lost, that sex and violence are bedfellows

Mano Destra has been described as a lesbian art film about consensual bondage, but it's also a film about objectification. A female body is contorted, obscured, and abstracted. Sound (high heels in a corridor, 80s dark-wave tunes) and image rarely match up. An erotic charge surges from the act of bondage itself – the fetishisation of skill, precision, and patience: 53 minutes in Übelmann's world was not enough.

The festival ended on a gentle note, exemplified by a rare screening of 16mm nude studies by the American painter and filmmaker James Herbert, celebrated for his music videos for R.E.M. – notably 'It's the End of the World as We Know It (and I Feel Fine)'. In *Night Horse* (1976), *Automan* (1988) and *Kolja & Sama* (1995–96) the bold grain, twilight hues, and manic youth rush found in the videos are tuned to the key of innocent lust and tender voyeurism. Herbert used an analytical projector (which allows you to change the frame rate) to create hypnotic staccato rhythms. *Night Horse* recalled the work of the contemporary photographer and filmmaker Jem Goulding, whose eye roams around men as Herbert's does around the young – fey bodies in a mystic meadow following the call of twilight-to-dawn orgasmic bliss.

But Herbert's films induce melancholy – knowing that innocence will be lost, that sex and violence are bedfellows, and that this might be the only time we'll get to see this distinctive vision of sensuality... unless curators like Mikkola and Möller dig the films out again, and we are lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. 

BLOW UP

A documentary about art pioneers Action Space shows that their experiments with air pumps were far more than a wizard wheeze

By Sukhdev Sandhu

"The inflatable scene is getting pretty densely populated," claimed the architectural critic Reyner Banham in 1968: "You name it, someone is blowing it up right now." Air was where it was at in the late 60s and early 70s. The British artist Graham Stevens created hoverscapes which would allow travellers to cross swamps and valleys without getting wet. For his project *Sky Line* (1967), Hans Haacke released over Central Park big white balloons that resembled clouds. In 1968 Christo and Jeanne-Claude developed an inflatable structure named the *5,600 Cubicmeter Package* which towered 280 feet over Kassel. From Buckminster Fuller to Andy Warhol, Cedric Price to the designers of inflatable dresses and Habitat furniture, pneumatic art represented imaginative liberation, an escape from the gravity of history, ludic futurism.

One of the most sustained engagements with inflatable aesthetics was undertaken by Action Space. This North London-based company, founded in 1968 by Alan Nisbet and Ken and Mary Turner, was committed to taking art out of the gallery and into the wider world. Tuned into signals from the counter-culture – the experimental architecture of Peter Cook's Archigram, the explosive performances associated with Allan Kaprow's concept of 'Happenings', the celebration of childhood and youthfulness that *Oz* editor Richard Neville called 'play power' – Action Space brought inflatables to waste grounds and derelict spaces, inviting working-class and young people to leap and crawl, bounce and bump, to use their bodies in ways discouraged by industrial society.

Huw Wahl's new documentary is a meditative, visually rich portrait of this band of dreamers. He's the son (from a later marriage) of Ken Turner and, though he rarely appears on screen, his film is a quietly moving attempt to



A blow against convention: inside on one of Action Space's inflatable structures

understand the ideals that captivated his father. *Action Space* follows *To Hell with Culture* (2014), an investigation of the impact of Herbert Read, anarchist thinker and co-founder of London's Institute of Contemporary Arts, who argued against the separation of art and society.

Action Space explores the politics of breathing. At what point does the air around us feel inert and even poisonous? How can we reoxygenate ourselves? This questioning becomes a moment of potential, of radical reimagining. As the architectural historian Marc Dessauce argued, "Pneumatics and revolution agree well. Both are fuelled by wind and the myth of transcendence; as the balloon enraptures the child, they animate and transport us on the promise of an imminent passage into a perfected future."

In the film, the philosopher Johan Siebers

'Action Space' explores the politics of breathing. At what point does the air around us feel inert and even poisonous?

discusses inflatable art as a kind of situationist tactic to liberate modern society from psychological incarceration. The Turners emerge as part of that spectrum of late 60s/early 70s utopianists – squatters, commune dwellers, homesteaders – for whom space was the place.

Film was also important to the group, who amassed a sizeable archive. The footage Wahl uses is enchanting. Against a rubbescapable yet to recover from the war, the inflatables' vivid colours and playful shapes are unearthly. All that was solid becomes wobbly. Poor neighbourhoods are turned into *It's A Knockout* sets. Here are the antics of Richard Lester's *The Running, Jumping & Standing Still Film* (1960). Children clamber and slide and fly like urchin astronauts. In scenes shot at a contemporary inflatable building workshop, giant strips of material resemble pieces in a cosmic puzzle.

Sound, much of it by pioneering free improvisers AMM and vocalist Phil Minton, is pivotal to the film. These musicians emerged at roughly the same time as Action Space, making discombobulating, often challenging records characterised by what the subtitle of Trevor Barre's recent book *Beyond Jazz* calls "plink, plonk and scratch".

Action Space breathes life into what might seem a minor story in post-war British art. It conjures up the possibility of a national canon of inflatable culture, to include Jeremy Deller's *Sacrilege* (2012), in which Stonehenge is turned into a bouncy castle, and Andrew Kötting's multimedia *Deadad* project (2006), in which the filmmaker travelled the world with a blow-up version of his violent father. More than that, Action Space's rise and fall (in its original guise it disbanded in 1981) offer much to contemplate for anyone interested in experimental pedagogy, relational aesthetics, and in resisting hostile architecture and corporate urbanism. 

 **Huw Wahl's film will be shown as part of a conference on Action Space on 30 September at the University of Huddersfield (www.hud.ac.uk/research/researchcentres/st/psia/), and at Regent Street Cinema, London, on 15 December**

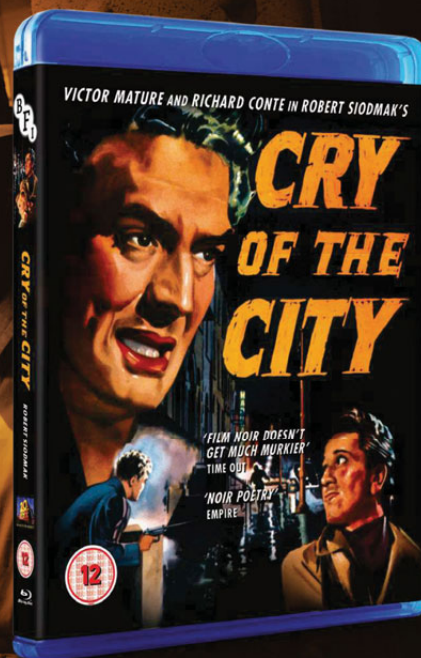


True colours: Action Space's performance space with modular steel structure

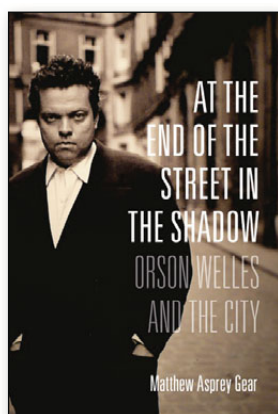


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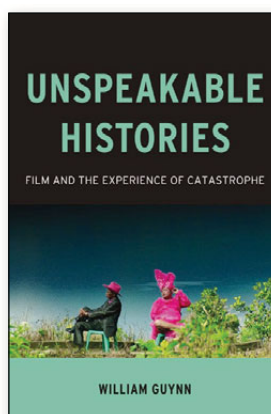
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To find comparable documentary images of man-made devastation and derangement you'd have to look all the way back to Werner Herzog's 'Lessons of Darkness'



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Grievous angel: Tom Sweet as the young leader, a disturbed child clever enough to keep quiet and plot his revenges

The Childhood of a Leader

United Kingdom/France/Hungary/USA/
Belgium 2015. Director: Brady Corbet
Certificate 12A 115m 42s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

In defiance of the current vogue for spoiler warnings, Brady Corbet's first film as a director gives away its outcome in its title – which is taken from Jean-Paul Sartre's 1939 short story, though the script (which Corbet co-wrote with Mona Fastvold) draws on many other sources – Robert Graves (*I, Claudius*) and Hannah Arendt (*The Origins of Totalitarianism*) are among those credited. With its precisely titled chapters ('The First Tantrum', etc) and foreshadowing conversations about the rearrangement of post-war Europe, it is plain where this story is going – though it's still able to spring

surprises. Even the credits are arresting: stark blocks of names that don't linger on screen.

First seen literally as an angel (in costume for a nativity play), the young leader-to-be – whose character name is withheld until the climax, suggesting an identity coalescing under a rock – is an androgynous youth who bristles at being mistaken for a girl but resists having his long hair cut. Ten-year-old Tom Sweet is extraordinarily credible as a disturbed child who is clever enough to keep quiet and plot his revenges. As adults remotely fuss with details of the Treaty of Versailles in darkened rooms, the boy simmers – using reverse psychology on his neurotic mother as he misbehaves by going to his room and learning his lessons. When his blunt father is infuriated that a small child has somehow risen to rule his household, he batters down the door and inflicts physical punishment. The boy exaggerates the resulting injury to solidify his position as a

martyr, before committing a monstrous, violent, public act which jars history itself (signified by dizzying camera cartwheels and a terrifying Scott Walker score). While the milieu of the bulk of the film is meticulously historical, with the real diplomats involved in the treaty namedropped, the coda takes place in an alternate timeline where there is room among the strong men of the 20th century for the ahistorical 'Prescott, the bastard', who rules over an unspecified country (the Freedonia of *Duck Soup*, the America of Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, the Oceania of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*?). The fact that Robert Pattinson takes a double role – first, as a journalist friend of the young boy's parents, and later as the bald-headed, neon-eyed adult leader himself – suggests that Prescott may be a bastard literally as well as figuratively.

Specifics of the young Prescott's misdeeds (throwing stones at churchgoers) are taken from



Devil in disguise: Tom Sweet with Stacy Martin as the tutor he gets sacked

Early on, the child Prescott dreams of his future – marked by East German-style paternoster lifts and the unsettling absence of his mother – and Corbet and Fastvold seem playfully to be drawing on *The Omen*, in which the Antichrist is raised in a diplomatic family and also plays off a worshipful, venomous nanny against a fragile, doomed mother. When dismissed, Mona the housekeeper promises Prescott's mother that she will devote every waking hour "to destroying your family". The throwaway detail that the multilingual mother (Bérénice Bejo – replacing the originally cast Juliette Binoche) is from Strasbourg, a city about to be ceded by Germany to France in the treaty her husband is working on, suggests how far she is a victim of history. She personally has been annexed by America, in the person of the brutal idiot played ferociously by Liam Cunningham, while retaining feelings for Europe, personified by Robert Pattinson. And before Prescott can set out on his path to greatness he has to strike at her – an infantile Hamlet, or perhaps Norman Bates with a political agenda.

As an actor, Corbet appeared in *Funny Games US* (2007) – and his detached, clear-eyed manner is plainly influenced by Michael Haneke, with an especial nod to *The White Ribbon* (2009). He also starred in and co-wrote Antonio Campos's *Simon Killer*, another study of a spoiled brat on a pathway to murder. But this is more than an imitation game. There's a distinctive chill to the way the film picks up on childish whims and follows them as they become obsessions. The boy touches the compliant, matronly Mona's breast and then

fixates (in a long-held close shot) on the nipple, discerned through a thin blouse, of the younger Ada, his tutor. He hums a snatch of Beethoven's Seventh (often a theme tune for megalomania, as coincidentally in *X-Men: Apocalypse*), takes a lesson from a fable, about a lion and a mouse, that shocks adults (later, the lion-head becomes the symbol of his tyranny), and he speaks softly (in two languages), only snarling "yes" or "no" at the grown-ups he is already determined to overthrow. Something is wrong in this household, in this continent, in this century – and yet it's inevitable.

The adult actors are all excellent, though required to be stooges for Sweet. It takes three parents, several servants, a world war, a corrupt church (Prescott yells "I don't believe in praying any more" like a mantra) to shape this monster. The failures of these adults and their institutions create the vacuum that allows his eventual rise. This may be the story of the childhood of a leader, but we have to look at the grown-ups who fail to solve or resolve anything – from a dinner menu to an equitable peace – for a sketch of the mass abdication of responsibility that might make a great many people *want* to be led by a dangerous maniac. This is also the story of those who will be led. ☹

There's a distinctive chill to the way the film picks up on childish whims and follows them as they become obsessions

the childhood of Mussolini, but the imaginary flags and symbols of the hallucinatory finale position him as any dictator. In fact, the likes of Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini and Franco were shaped by the political and social climes of the late 19th century through to World War I; Prescott is younger, though he swims in the same pool. It's not to trivialise the nuanced and serious *Childhood of a Leader* to say that it would work well as a prequel to a *Fantastic Four* movie that focused on the character of Latverian dictator Dr Doom. Several recent films have touched on the early years of sociopaths – Craig William MacNeill's *The Boy*, Billy O'Brien's *I Am Not a Serial Killer* – but this takes things further, to focus on a malaise which is set to have an impact perhaps on a global scale, a pertinent subject in an era in which nation states of all stripes are flirting with the notion of elevating pathological egoists to the highest office.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Helena Danielsson
István Major
Produced by
Chris Coen
Ron Curtis
Antoine de
Clermont-Tonnerre
Written by
Brady Corbet
Mona Fastvold
**Director of
Photography**

Lol Crawley
Edited by
David Jancsó
Production Designer
Jean-Vincent Puzos
**Original
Composition**
Scott Walker
**Supervising
Sound Editor**
David Vranken
Costume Designer
Andrea Flesch

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Scion Pictures and
Bow and Arrow
Entertainment
present in association
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and Studio l'Equipe
a Bron Capital
Partners, Crystal
Wealth, Unanimous
Entertainment Ltd.

MACT Productions,
Filmtam production
Executive Producers
Matthew Pernicaro
Michael Sherman
Aaron L. Gilbert
Clayton Smith
Pat Murray
Lee Stone
Brian Young
Megan Wynn
Mona Fastvold

Cast
Bérénice Bejo
mother
Liam Cunningham
father
Yolande Moreau
Mona
Stacy Martin
Ada
Jacques Boudet
priest
Robert Pattinson
Charles Marker/

Prescott as an adult
Tom Sweet
Prescott as a boy

In Colour
[L66:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Metrodome
Distribution Ltd

France, 1918-19. An American diplomat is involved with the negotiations for a peace treaty in the wake of World War I. He stays at a house outside Paris with his German-born wife and their young son. The boy takes part in a church nativity play, but gets in trouble for throwing stones at the congregation and is forced to apologise. When the boy refuses to eat his dinner, doting housekeeper Mona indulges him with food. Mona

is dismissed by the boy's mother. In retaliation, the boy retreats to his room and learns to read a French fable – then insists that he no longer needs Ada, the tutor his parents have hired, so she is dismissed too. At a dinner party to commemorate the end of the negotiations, the boy – Prescott – attacks and grievously wounds his mother. Years later, Prescott is the leader of a totalitarian regime.

Cosmos

France/Portugal 2015

Director: Andrzej Zulawski

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Andrzej Zulawski (1940-2016) was, along with Walerian Borowczyk, Roman Polanski and Jerzy Skolimowski, one of a number of filmmakers who found themselves so creatively out of tune with the artistic requirements of the communist regime ruling their native Poland until 1989 that they exiled themselves westwards as soon as the opportunity arose. Despite considerable *succès d'estime* in France, where he made the majority of his 13 feature films, Zulawski is surprisingly obscure on the other side of the Channel: *Cosmos* is only the fourth of his films to get a British commercial release, after his debut *The Third Part of the Night* (1971), the notorious Cannes-prizewinner-turned-official-video-nasty *Possession* (1981) and a blinkworthy outing for his penultimate film *La Fidélité* (2000), with the rest only accessible via expensive Blu-ray and DVD imports.

His first feature in 15 years and, sadly, his last following his death from cancer earlier this year, *Cosmos* is cut from broadly similar philosophical cloth to that which dressed Béla Tarr's similarly cosmic *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000), although Zulawski's film is both brisker and cheekier, a sprightly scherzo to Tarr's measured largo. It should be emphasised from the outset that the film's British premiere was regularly punctuated by audience laughter, since films that grapple with the mysteries of human existence don't normally qualify as riotous thigh-slappers. However, Zulawski is more than happy to send up both his characters and indeed himself – at one point his protagonist Witold (Jonathan Genet) denounces *L'important c'est d'aimer* as “a stupid title”, although it is shared by the 1975 film that cemented Zulawski's French reputation.

Cosmos is the third attempt at translating a novel by Witold Gombrowicz (1904-69) into cinematic form. The two previous efforts were also by Polish directors and had a mixed reception, with the usually redoubtable Jerzy Skolimowski badly coming a cropper (by his own repeated admission) with 1991's *Ferdynand* (which had the homophonic alternative title *30 Door Key*) and Jan Jakub Kolski making an uneasily Holocaust-tinged fist of *Pornografia* in 2003. Aside from transplanting the action from the Tatra mountains to the sun-kissed coastline of western Europe and replacing Polish references and names with French ones (although the paranoid protagonist continues to bear the name Witold – a legacy, we're told, of his mother's devotion to the author), Zulawski's adaptation of Gombrowicz's final novel *Kosmos* (1965) is generally faithful not just to the original narrative structure but also to much of its feverishly surreal imagery. When he shows a young woman lying on the bare bedsprings of the room that's soon to become Witold's, Zulawski is clearly mindful of the novel's obsessive linkage of flesh and metal, even if he necessarily turns it into more of a throwaway moment.

One of the fundamental challenges of adapting *Cosmos* (and Gombrowicz in general) is that the central storyline and the behaviour of the characters frequently seem not just implausible but actively ludicrous, the product of a mind

as doggedly obsessive as that of the onscreen Witold. But as anyone who's seen even one of his previous films will be well aware, Zulawski fully shares this sensibility, and isn't remotely afraid of cranking up floridly melodramatic situations to the absolute maximum, watching the resulting sparks fly with a gaze as enthralled as that with which Witold observes Madame Woytis (Sabine Azéma) and her frenzied bout of wood-chopping. At moments of high emotional stress, she freezes as though operated by a remote control; her husband Léon (Jean-François Balmer) burbles away in a language that's part-French, part-gibberish (working closely with Zulawski, Daniel Bird has done an outstanding job on the English subtitles); and their daughter Lena (Viktória Guerra), though notionally happily affianced, seems to be just as drawn to Witold as he is to her, though this is conveyed through visual euphemism, such as the caressing of dinnertime cutlery, rather than anything more direct. Azéma's presence isn't the only reminder of the work of her late husband Alain Resnais, particularly the later Alan Ayckbourn-inspired farces.

The Woytis family runs a French pension in what appears to be coastal Portugal (the film is a French-Portuguese production), upon which friends Witold and Fuchs (Johan Libéreau) stumble while looking for an opportunity to take a break from the pressures of academia (Witold) and the demands of working in a high-profile fashion house (Fuchs). Their physical dissimilarity – Witold is a beanpole with a permanently haunted face, Fuchs shorter and jollier – strongly and presumably consciously recalls double acts such as Laurel and Hardy, and the terrific chemistry between Genet and Libéreau turns their ongoing commentary on the film's increasingly bizarre events into one of its many regular pleasures. Or perhaps a more helpful analogy than Laurel and Hardy is Vladimir and Estragon: Witold and Fuchs are waiting for a Godot who has apparently been planting mysteriously connected signs and symbols – various hanging creatures (a sparrow, a plucked chicken), an arrow, a rake, an unexpected slug on a breakfast roll, the Brownian motion of freshly spilled peas.

The would-be novelist Witold seizes on all this as evidence of a coherent plan in an otherwise terrifyingly chaotic universe, regularly retiring to his room to pound his MacBook keyboard, the screen set to display unusually large text as if to emphasise its wrenched-from-the-viscera importance (Witold is studying law – yet more evidence of a desire to impose order upon disorder). Fuchs, whose interests tend towards the sybaritic and sensual more than the rarefied and intellectual, humours his friend (and occasionally tugs him gently back to earth) while embarking on nocturnal excursions of an apparently sadomasochistic nature, though we only get to see the aftermath in the form of livid bruises. The various conversations between them and the others touch on Sartre, Stendhal, Tolstoy, Chaplin, Bleughman, Spielbleugh, Strindbleugh (sic, sic, sic) before briefly finding universally recognised common ground in Tintin.

What does this all mean? Perhaps absolutely nothing – Witold reveals early on that he's a devotee of Sartre's first novel *Nausea*, and may well share the same obsessions as its depressive protagonist Roquentin, including a fanatical belief in the interconnected potency of otherwise mysterious signs. He focuses so completely



Lip service: Viktória Guerra, Clémentine Pons

The central storyline and the behaviour of the characters in Gombrowicz's books frequently seem not just implausible but actively ludicrous



Jonathan Genet as Witold, Andy Gillet as Lucien



on the immediate object of his interest that he completely ignores everything else. In one of several laugh-out-loud moments, he spots a small arrow-shaped mark in the ceiling while everyone else will doubtless be rather more struck by the marked resemblance of a much larger water stain to aroused female genitalia – although this is, like so much else, a construction that our own overly active imaginations place on wholly innocent raw materials.

While a pat 'solution' to the central mystery is proffered near the end, it comes shortly before the narrative fractures into multiple directions and possibilities, with suicides, murders and final pairings-off that may not have taken place at all, interspersed with moments of out-and-out surrealism (including the show-stopping appearance of a swarm of bees) – before an end-credits coda featuring Zulawski's own crew setting up various shots confirms that it's not just the film's characters who are in the business of manipulating our perceptions. And it's here that Zulawski's *Cosmos* is completely faithful not just to the methodical madness of Gombrowicz's universe but also to his own wild and wayward career. As last films go, it's one hell of an exit. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Paulo Branco
Written by
[A film by]
Andrzej Zulawski
Based on the novel by
Witold Gombrowicz
Director of
Photography
André Szankowski
Editor
Julia Gregory
Art Director

Paula Szabo
Original Music
Andrzej Korzynski
Sound
Jean-Paul Muges
Thomas Robert
Nicolas d'Halluin
Costumes
Patricia Saalburg

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Production,
Leopardo Filmes

Production
Companies
Paulo Branco presents
an Alfama Films
Production, Leopardo
Filmes co-production
with the participation
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Animée, Instituto
do Cinema e do
Audiovisual, RTP
Developed with

the support of
Programme MEDIA de
l'Union Européenne
and Procirep

Cast
Sabine Azéma
Madame Woytis
Jean-François
Balmer
Leon
Jonathan Genet

Witold
Johan Libéreau
Fuchs
Victória Guerra
Lena
Clémentine Pons
Catherette/Ginette
Andy Gillet
Lucien
Ricardo Pereira
Tôlo
António Simão
priest

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles
Distributor
Arrow Films

The Portuguese coast, the present. Roaming a forest, student Witold finds a hanged sparrow. He and his friend Fuchs stumble upon a hotel run by the Woytis family: retired banker Leon, his wife and their daughter Lena, assisted by Catherette the maid, whose deformed upper lip fascinates both men. At night, Witold obsesses about signs and their significance (Lena's fiancé Lucien has told him about a similarly hanged chicken) and tries to write a novel, while Fuchs goes in search of apparently sadomasochistic gratification. While successive mealtimes reveal more of the Woytis family's various eccentricities, Witold continues to spot uncanny occurrences that he is increasingly certain are connected. Witold and Fuchs sneak into Catherette's room, convinced that her lips are part of the pattern,

but find nothing. Lusting after the unattainable Lena, Witold impulsively strangles her cat and hangs it. The resulting investigation raises tempers to the point where Leon proposes that they have a relaxing holiday in Lucien's cliff-top house. Acquiring a hitchhiking priest en route, the group meets Tolo and Ginette, friends of Lena's. Witold and Fuchs are fascinated by Ginette's uncanny resemblance to Catherette, though without the deformed lip. During a forest walk, Leon suggests to Witold that he was responsible for the strange occurrences. Lucien is found hanged, and Witold and Lena kiss in front of his corpse, after which Witold appears to strangle her. Witold and Fuchs part, and Witold goes off either with Lena or on his own. Andrzej Zulawski's film crew sets up another shot.



Bourne under punches: Matt Damon in his fourth outing as the super-spy

Jason Bourne

USA/Japan 2016

Director: Paul Greengrass

Certificate 12A 123m 10s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The triple crisis of the modern spy movie is the redundancy of human intelligence, of the secret agent, and of spectatorial agency. The control room, which made its first impact on the genre in *Patriot Games* (1992) and is a central location in all of the Bourne films, is a space where the operators cede ever more control to ever more sophisticated technology. In the first set-piece of *Jason Bourne*, in which the CIA in Langley deploys its assets in Athens to kill Jason Bourne (Matt Damon) and his old helper Nicky Parsons (Julia Stiles), both 'off the grid' since the events of *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007), the control room has acquired something approaching artificial intelligence, processing more inputs than any human would be capable of in order to find and – crucially – predict the movements of the operators' prey. The actual agents, or assets, are vectors on a screen; Bourne's longstanding aim, having realised this, is to get out.

One problem this causes the films as films is to do with perception. In the age of Fritz Lang and Alfred Hitchcock, when the cinematic apparatus

was close to being state-of-the-art technology, part of the pleasure of the spy movie was its intensification of ordinary visual perception: the attentive viewer, feeling him or herself to have taken on some of the attributes of the spy, was rewarded for noticing the clues that skilled directors had threaded through their precisely edited work, sometimes – as was Hitchcock's speciality – in advance of the characters. Such were the mechanics of suspense. Now, however, the spectator, like the control room operators, has to respond to an impossible overload of information, which is not only conveyed through systems more abstract than those of the cinema, but interpreted by them too.

Paul Greengrass's response to the new espionage paradigm has been, famously, to eschew the clarity of Lang or Hitchcock and make everything harder to interpret or predict. Twelve years – the same span of time that separates Lang's *Dr Mabuse* (1922) from Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) – have passed since his first contribution to the series, *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004), and its shaky camerawork and discontinuous editing have become so influential that one might have expected a change of course, such as Tony Gilroy took with *The Bourne Legacy* (2012). Far from it – if anything *Jason Bourne*, which Greengrass co-wrote with his regular editor Christopher Rouse, is even

less easy to follow than its predecessors. Not that the plot, or the outline of each sequence, is difficult to grasp; rather, from shot to shot in any given chase or fight, it is often hard to see what is happening. The novelty has worn off.

Nor is the plot anything new. Once again Bourne has to decipher his own flashbacks; once again he moves from city to city, revisiting two of the capitals from earlier instalments, London and Berlin; once again he partially wins over the woman in the control room (this time Alicia Vikander) while retaining the enmity of the man (now Tommy Lee Jones). Even the tradecraft is familiar. In *Supremacy* Bourne meets Nicky in Alexanderplatz so as to coincide with a political demonstration which will give them cover to talk off-mic; in *Jason Bourne* they use a (much more spectacular) demo in Syntagma Square in Athens. Plenty has happened in the world since 2007, but once again the only named enemy is the CIA, albeit in partnership with Silicon Valley.

Whereas in *Ultimatum* Bourne took some interest in publicising the CIA's sins, he is now focused on staying off the grid, and becomes only incidentally involved in the film's secondary plot, a torn-from-the-headlines affair to do with the Agency's financing and exploitation of a social media platform, Deep Dream, a clear reference to the activities of the CIA's actual venture capital arm, In-Q-Tel. Deep Dream holds out the prospect



However sophisticated the control room may have become, 'Jason Bourne' still comes down to two men slugging it out in an alleyway

of a still more intensive form of surveillance beyond human control, under the CIA codename 'Ironhand' – to be added to Treadstone, Blackbriar and Outcome in the Bourne Terminology – with the twist that its subjects are willing volunteers. (In between the first two films Bourne and Marie were able to go off-grid simply by travelling to Goa; though Bourne begins this one somewhere untraceable in the Balkans, it's worth wondering whether anywhere is off the grid now.)

In some respects *Jason Bourne* presents itself as a transitional film: it ends with Vikander's character, Heather Lee, making a play for the directorship of the CIA partly on the basis that she, unlike Jones's character, speaks the same language as the techies, having gone to Stanford with Deep Dream's CEO Aaron Kalloor (Riz Ahmed), and will be able to keep them on-side in the future. There is nothing terribly wrong with this, but it feels a little dated – a not dissimilar surveillance system was proposed in *Eagle Eye* (2008), for example – and it shows up *Jason Bourne*'s wilfully plain script. Kalloor is made a largely functional presence rather than a full character, almost as if the Bourne films aren't risk being seen indulging in the sort of tech-industry knockabout common elsewhere in popular culture. Similarly Christian Dassault (Vincenz Kiefer), the Julian Assange type with whom Nicky is involved, barely gets a word in, just about managing the rather on-the-nose statement: "We both want to take down the corrupt institutions that control society."

By contrast, the Bourne scripts which Gilroy wrote had what *Telegraph* critic Tim Robey called "an expressive way with monosyllables", particularly when delivered by Brian Cox (in the first two), Joan Allen (in the second two), David Strathairn (in the third), and Edward Norton (in the fourth). Jones (gruff) and Vikander (bland) are less entertaining, leaving the film without much of a villain other than Vincent Cassell's largely mute assassin.

Greengrass's public persona as a serious director of serious projects in between Bourne movies contributes to the impression that snappy dialogue and memorable villains can be done without, since *Jason Bourne* is using the genre as 'cover' for serious issues, ironically reversing the logic of the Syntagma Square sequence. Whereas at the level of plot the political demonstration in the background confounds the pursuers in the foreground, from the other perspective the foreground pursuit serves to facilitate the more important purpose of showing the political

demonstration. But we learn nothing of Syntagma Square or of Greece's troubles simply by being shown a demonstration, and in general the film's political understanding does not compare well with that of, say, the TV series *Homeland*. If Heather is right in claiming to her superiors that Bourne is a patriot at heart and can therefore be brought back inside the fold, it would make him the exception within the franchise, which has tended to represent the US as beyond redemption.

However sophisticated the control room may have become, and however virtual the business of spying, *Jason Bourne* still comes down to two men slugging it out in an alleyway after chasing each other the wrong way down a busy Las Vegas boulevard in indestructible automobiles. Like its predecessors it ends with the shriek of Moby's 'Extreme Ways', as Bourne once again gets one over on his pursuers. And despite everything I'd be lying if I said I didn't enjoy it. 8

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Frank Marshall
Jeffrey M. Weiner
Ben Smith
Matt Damon
Paul Greengrass
Gregory Goodman
Written by
Paul Greengrass
Christopher Rouse
Based on characters created by Robert Ludlum

Director of Photography

Barry Ackroyd

Editor

Christopher Rouse

Production Designer

Paul Kirby

Music

John Powell

Supervising Sound Editor/Designer

Oliver Tarney

Costume Designer

Mark Bridges

Stunt Co-ordinator

Gary Powell

©Universal Studios
Production

Companies

Universal Pictures presents in association with Perfect World Pictures a Kennedy/Marshall production In association with Captivate Entertainment/Pearl Street A Paul Greengrass film Presented in association with Dentsu Inc./Fuji Television Network, Inc.

Executive Producers

Henry Morrison
Christopher Rouse
Jennifer Todd
Doug Liman

Cast

Matt Damon
Jason Bourne
Tommy Lee Jones
CIA Director
Robert Dewey
Alicia Vikander
Heather Lee

Vincent Cassell

asset
Julia Stiles
Nicky Parsons
Riz Ahmed
Aaron Kalloor

Dolby Digital

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor

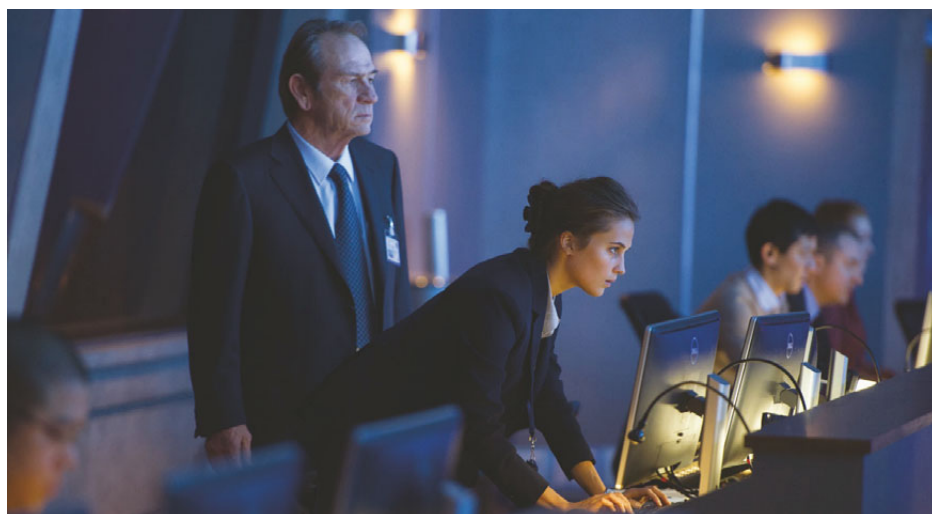
Universal Pictures International UK & Eire

The present. Jason Bourne and Nicky Parsons have been off the grid since the events of 'The Bourne Ultimatum', Bourne surviving as a bare-knuckle boxer, Nicky working for hacker Christian Dassault. When Nicky hacks into the CIA, she is detected by the CIA's cyber expert Heather Lee, and assets are deployed to kill her and Bourne at their rendezvous in Athens.

Nicky is killed in the moment of giving Bourne access to the stolen files. Bourne travels to Berlin to meet Dassault, and, before the CIA catches up, recovers from Nicky's computer the information that his father Robert Webb, who died in Beirut in 1999, was involved in the 'Treadstone' programme under which Bourne was recruited. Heather convinces the Director of National Intelligence that Bourne should be brought inside rather than killed.

When Bourne heads to London to interrogate an ex-spy, Heather's boss Robert Dewey sends an asset to kill him, while appearing to assent to Heather's plan. During the fracas Bourne recognizes the asset as the man who killed his father.

Heather helps Bourne travel to Las Vegas, where Dewey is to give a presentation at a tech conference with Aaron Kalloor, CEO of Deep Dream, a social media platform which the CIA funded and will use to gather intelligence. Bourne scotches Dewey's plan to kill Kalloor, and Heather kills Dewey just as he is about to kill Bourne. Bourne kills the asset who killed his father. In Washington DC, Heather, replacing Dewey, vows to recruit Bourne or kill him.



Slippery people: CIA operatives Tommy Lee Jones and Alicia Vikander

Absolutely Fabulous The Movie

USA/United Kingdom 2016
Director: Mandie Fletcher
Certificate 15 90m 46s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

The TV sitcom *Absolutely Fabulous* was at its sharpest when focused on the Holland Park abode of Edina Monsoon (Jennifer Saunders), the self-styled PR guru whose best friend, fashion director Patsy Stone (Joanna Lumley), was a regular visitor. Edina's bookish teenage daughter Saffron (Julia Sawalha) would watch with an air of resignation as the pair clattered around in ill-fitting designer outfits, grabbing bottles of Bollinger from the expansive fridge and gossiping about celebrities. And so the long-awaited movie spin-off begins on safe ground, hitting familiar and funny beats from the series as Edina and Patsy continue their usual routine nearly 25 years on, no lessons learned: they're colourful, champagne-swilling whirlwinds of delusion, selfishness and hedonism. One of the most hilarious scenes sees them throwing a drug-fuelled party for two in what is revealed to be the bedroom of Edina's granddaughter, beautifully demonstrating that these two older women are still akin to children: infantile, petulant, self-serving and bored by anything that isn't considered 'fun'.

Fun, then, is the focus of the *Absolutely Fabulous* film: the pair lurch drunkenly from awards ceremony to fashion show to party, eventually ending up in the South of France after being implicated in the disappearance of model Kate Moss, gamely playing herself. While a few episodes of the TV series departed from the London location to amusing effect (the 1994 episode 'Morocco', for example), the movie is on less confident ground on the Riviera, cluttering the screen with a string of celebrity cameos (writer Saunders estimates that there are 60). One or two amuse, such as Rebel Wilson as a flight attendant and Jon Hamm and Barry Humphries as former Patsy conquests, but many non-actors struggle to convince, and the film strains under the weight of random appearances by the likes of Graham Norton and Jerry Hall.

Moss's disappearance isn't particularly



Decked out: Joanna Lumley, Jennifer Saunders

interesting; it's merely a device for practical and comical purposes, taking the leads to France and confirming their status as outsiders. The narrative structure offers little tension, flitting restlessly from scene to scene. The film suffers too from curious editing decisions – the potential of some scenes (an OAPs' party with Edina's mother, for example) is squandered, while others – mostly involving the singer Lulu – are largely pointless. Director Mandie Fletcher, who has worked on hit TV shows from *Blackadder the Third* to *Miranda*, fails to bring the parts together into a cohesive feature narrative.

In lesser writing and acting hands this could have been a disaster, but the film is saved by Saunders and Lumley. While Edina's neuroses, clumsy pratfalls and catchphrases feel overfamiliar at times, Lumley makes Patsy's lines sound fresh, and the pair are still a terrific double act. As a writer, Saunders may have little care for story arcs but she can still pen a killer put-down or one-liner, and laughs frequently land. *Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie* is not as good as the best episodes of the series, but it's just funny enough to be worth the price of admission. **S**

Almost Holy

USA 2015
Director: Steve Hoover

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

As he shares a car journey with the camera crew, Pastor Gennadiy Mokhnenko, the brawny social reformer at the centre of this fresco of latterday Ukraine, brandishes a hot dog and a cardboard cup of coffee in smiling triumph, suggesting that these are emblematic of a positive Western influence on a country where roadside service stations previously failed to provide even the most basic washrooms. It's a rare moment of levity in a documentary that depicts life on the very bottom of the social ladder in Mariupol, a city whose shattered public finances have left social services and policing lacking the resources or even the will to assist the most vulnerable. Enter the square-jawed, uncompromising Mokhnenko, who refuses to stand by while drug-using children are living on the streets, even if it means apprehending them by force to give them a new start in his residential rehab unit. The contrast between the scrawny needle-marked wretches he rounds up from inside sewers and under vehicles and the healthy kids we later see goofing around on trampolines and building up their pipe-cleaner physiques certainly tells its own story.

American director Steve Hoover first attracted attention with *Blood Brother* (2013), a documentary about a personal friend who found a calling helping Aids-afflicted children in Chennai, India. He certainly puts the time in on the ground here, doggedly capturing Mokhnenko at home (where he and his spouse have adopted some of the street children) and at work, whether delivering a rousing pep talk to an exercise yard lined with uniformed female prisoners or intervening in the shocking abuse and neglect of the deaf and mentally handicapped. Mokhnenko is without doubt a compelling subject, a Good Samaritan on steroids as it were; and although the film registers criticism of him on a TV chat show and via his Wikipedia entry, Hoover is canny enough to know that Mokhnenko's actions, as heroic as they are problematic, furnish us with an engrossing array of mixed feelings. Yes, the pastor is a self-righteous bully who clearly enjoys the media attention, that's for sure, but if he weren't helping all these unfortunates they would be left to an even more dismal fate. Indeed, the abject lives we're shown prove at times so harrowing that even hardened doc-hounds may find themselves questioning the value of such content – is this useful social consciousness-raiser, or a good old wallow in the sufferings of the faraway and the disenfranchised?

Indeed, the material is so elemental – fittingly, Mokhnenko gets into a discussion of *The Brothers Karamazov* at one point – that Hoover rather struggles to contain it, and his film is at times fussily self-conscious in allowing cameraman John Pope to play with tricky split-focus and a slightly pushy expressionist colour palette. If the images at times seem to call too much attention to their own aesthetic appeal (hardly a coincidence, then, that Terrence Malick is an executive producer), the editing is especially sharp, shifting the point of attack so that the narrative never falls into comfortable predictability. Hoover uses pertinent clips from a popular Soviet-era stop-motion cartoon to point up the drift in cohesive idealism in the intervening

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Damian Jones
Jon Plowman

Written by

Jennifer Saunders
Based on an original series by BBC

Comedy Productions

Additional Material

Ruby Wax

Director of

Photography

Chris Goodger

Editor

Gavin Buckley

Production Designer

Rebecca Hale

Harry Banks

Composer

Charlie Mole

Production

Sound Mixer

Paul Munro

Costume Designer

Rebecca Hale

Companies

Fox Searchlight

Pictures presents

in association with

BBC Films a DJ

Films/Saunders &

French production

Made in association with TSG

Entertainment

In association with The British

Film Company

Developed with the assistance of BBC Films

Cast

Jennifer Saunders

Edina Monsoon, 'Eddy'

Joanna Lumley

Patsy Stone

Julia Sawalha

Executive Producers

Maureen Vincent

Jennifer Saunders

Dawn French

Christine Langan

Nichola Martin

Steve Milne

Christian Eisenbeiss

Saffron Monsoon,

'Saffy'

Jane Horrocks

Bubble

June Whitfield

Mother

Chris Colfer

Christopher

Kate Moss

Lulu

Emma Bunton

themselves

Robert Webb

Nick

Barry Humphries

Charlie

Jon Hamm

Graham Norton

Jerry Hall

themselves

Rebel Wilson

air stewardess

Indeyarna

Donaldson-Holness

Lola

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

20th Century Fox

International (UK)

London, the present. On hearing that the model Kate Moss has left her publicist, PR Edina Monsoon attends a party, hoping to sign her up. With Edina is friend Patsy Stone and granddaughter Lola, daughter of Saffron. As Edina jostles to speak to Moss, who is sitting on a wall outside the party, the model falls into the Thames, and is presumed dead. Edina is blamed and questioned by police. She scours the river hoping to find Moss, asking her assistant Bubble to go into the water – but Bubble also disappears. Edina flees to Cannes with Patsy and Lola, in search of a windfall. Edina's mother is also there at a party.

After failing to win back a rich ex-boyfriend, Patsy poses as a man and romances the richest woman in the world. They wed, and Patsy and Edina live the high life at the Hotel du Cap. They are pursued by police and end up in a swimming pool apparently owned by Bubble (who has been siphoning funds from the business). Bubble is alive and well; she informs them that Moss is also alive – she went partying with Jean Paul Gaultier and lost track of time. Patsy tells her wife that she is not a man – her wife responds that she is not exactly a woman either. Back in London, Moss signs with Edina's agency and restores her fortunes.

Anthropoid

Director: Sean Ellis
Certificate 15 120m 19s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

"These are dangerous times." Not something, you might think, that anyone in 1942 Nazi-occupied Prague needed to be told; but the script of *Anthropoid*, co-written by Anthony Frewin and director Sean Ellis (*Metro Manila*, *The Broken*), is cumbered with plonky lines like this. ("Czechoslovakia is with us!") emotes one character at a crucial juncture.) The title, which suggests a comic-book blockbuster about a rampaging giant ape, is named for Operation Anthropoid, the real-life mission to assassinate Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich, chief deviser of the 'Final Solution', third-ranking in the Nazi party and famed as 'the Butcher of Prague'. It's an exciting enough story and could, handled with a little more subtlety and a little less duration, prove gripping.

Other filmmakers, of course, have been attracted to these events, from Fritz Lang (*Hangmen Also Die!*, 1943) and Douglas Sirk (*Hitler's Madman*, 1943) to Jirí Sequens's *Atentát* (1965) and Lewis Gilbert's *Operation Daybreak* (1975). Of these, only *Atentát* – not surprisingly, being a Czech film – plays in Czech; all the others cast English-speaking actors in the lead roles and play predominantly in English. As does *Anthropoid* – and the sight, and sound, of familiar figures such as Cillian Murphy and Toby Jones adopting area-unspecific Mitteleuropean accents leads to a certain sense of disengagement. Yet more of a problem is the length of the film: it runs for two hours, much of which is taken up with people shouting at each other in darkened rooms. There's perhaps some justification for this in that the two men charged with the assassination arrived in Czechoslovakia in December 1941 and didn't carry out their task until late May, but it makes for wearisome viewing.

The film picks up in its final half-hour. Following the assassination attempt – eventually successful, in that Heydrich died of his wounds a week later – the assassins and their resistance



Hit happened here: Cillian Murphy, Jamie Dornan

comrades take refuge in the Cathedral of Sts. Cyril and Methodius. When their hiding place is betrayed to the Nazi authorities, they're besieged by German troops, and after a six-hour battle the survivors kill themselves to avoid capture. This sequence, skilfully paced, choreographed and edited, restores the tension and involvement absent from much of the preceding 90 minutes. It's only spoiled by a hokey moment right at the end. Before the assassination bid, Josef Gabčík (Murphy) has become attached to Lenka (Anna Geislerová), a woman whose company he's sought as a cover and who is shot in the reprisals following his action. Now, about to die, he's vouchsafed a beatific vision of her holding out her arms to him, as if welcoming him into the true patriot's paradise.

Miscalculations like this mar the film, which otherwise might have done justice to one of the most audacious – if ultimately, perhaps, misguided – actions of WWII. A parallel might be with Patrick Leigh Fermor's kidnapping of General Kreipe in Crete in 1944, which also led to massive reprisals being inflicted on the local population. This exploit was likewise turned into a less-than-perfect movie, Powell and Pressburger's *Ill Met by Moonlight* (1957). *Anthropoid*, like P&P's film, ultimately feels like an opportunity missed. Ⓢ



The good shepherd: Gennadiy Mokhnenko

decades, and consistently returns to images of muscle-building physicality, illustrating a cult of masculine strength shared by Mokhnenko, his junior charges and (implicitly) Putin alike.

Ultimately, as the timeframe takes in the explosive recent conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Hoover's film becomes a despairing survey of the social detritus left behind, whether on the domestic scale of broken families or within the wider framework of national decay, when protectorship by the big men is no longer a solution. Stylistic quibbles aside, this is a hugely powerful viewing experience. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Danny Yourd	Production Companies A fiscally sponsored project of IFP – Independent Filmmaker Project	In Colour [2.35:1]
Cinematography John Pope	Executive Producer Terrence Malick	Subtitles
Edited by Steve Hoover	Producers Nicolas Gonda	Distributor Curzon Artificial Eye
Score Atticus Ross	Michael Killen	Festival title Crocodile Gennadiy
Leopold Ross	Kathy Dziubek	
Bobby Křic	Jim Kreitzburg	
Sound Mixer George Simpson		
©Animal Media Group		

A documentary portrait of Pastor Gennadiy Mokhnenko, who since 2000 has been an active social campaigner in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol, often taking the law into his own hands to remove abandoned children from the streets and place them in his rehabilitation centre. Despite being exposed to almost overwhelming levels of human suffering, including the abuse of the deaf and mentally handicapped, he continues to spread his ideas about good parenting, and is scathing about the failure of the former Soviet Union. Mariupol is eventually caught up in the violent conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Intensive bombing from pro-Russian separatists damages the rehabilitation centre. The future of Mokhnenko's project seems uncertain.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Sean Ellis	Music Robin Foster	production Made with the support of the Czech State Cinematography Fund
Supervising Sound Editor/Designer James Mather	Costume Designer Josef Cechota	Executive Producers Anita Overland
Written by Sean Ellis	Production Companies An LD Entertainment, Lucky Man Films, Silver A, 22h22	Leonard Glowinski
Cinematographer Sean Ellis		Krystof Mucha
Film Editor Richard Mettler		David Ondricek
Production Designer Morgan Kennedy		Jennifer Monroe
		Chris Curling

December 1941. Under orders from the Czech government-in-exile, Josef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš are parachuted into Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia to assassinate Reinhard Heydrich, Reichsprotektor of Bohemia and Moravia. Having disposed of two men who plan to turn them in, the pair make their way to Prague and contact the resistance. Ladislav Vanek, a local resistance fighter, objects that the killing of Heydrich will bring down cruel reprisals on the Czechs, but Josef insists the order must stand. Jan Zelenka-Hajsky takes Josef and Jan to lodge with the Moravec family; there they meet Marie, who helps out in the apartment. On New Year's Eve, Marie brings along her friend Lenka and the four go to the New Year's dance. Jan and Marie

Cast Jamie Dornan Jan Kubiš	Adolf Opálka Alena Mihulová Mrs Moravec	In Colour [2.35:1]
Cillian Murphy Josef Gabčík	Bill Milner Ata Moravec	Part-subtitled
Charlotte Le Bon Marie Kovárníková	Pavel Rezníček Alois Moravec	Distributor Icon Film Distribution
Anna Geislerová Lenka Fařková	Jiri Simek Karel Curda	
Toby Jones Jan Zelenka-Hajsky	Sam Keeley Josef Bublik	
'Uncle Hajsky' Harry Lloyd	Detlef Bothe Reinhard Heydrich	

grow attracted to each other, as do Josef and Lenka.

The assassination plan is carried out, but Josef's Sten gun jams and Heydrich is only wounded. The Nazis offer a reward for information leading to the capture of the assassins. In the reprisals that follow, Lenka is shot dead. Josef, Jan and the other resistance members take refuge in the cathedral, where the Moravcs' teenage son Ata brings them food. Heydrich dies of his wounds. A young resistance member, Karel, betrays the Moravcs; Mrs Moravec takes a cyanide capsule, but Ata is tortured until he reveals the hiding place. After a six-hour siege, Josef, Jan and all their resistance comrades are killed. End titles record that at least 5,000 Czechs were killed in reprisals.

Asterix The Mansions of the Gods

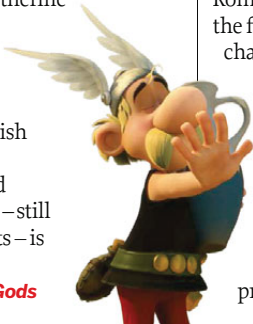
France/Belgium 2014
Director: Louis Clichy

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Five years after Steven Spielberg's disappointing *The Adventures of Tintin*, Europe's other iconic comic-strip character makes a far better CGI debut in *Asterix: The Mansions of the Gods*. But then, the source material is better suited to big-screen animation. Hergé's *Tintin* strip was about locations and situations more than action-adventure, forcing Spielberg to goose it up with sub-*Indiana Jones* set pieces, which were dull in CGI. The *Asterix* strip, on the other hand, was always full of cartoony knockabout, though with cleverer jokes running under the surface. *Mansions of the Gods* nails the tone straight away, introducing Gallic heroes Asterix and Obelix in a zippy race/playfight over possession of a worried wild boar and full of frantic physical comedy.

This French film is more an excellent translation from one medium to another than a cartoon creation in its own right, sacrificing the comic's linework for organic, bouncy-looking CGI animation with a similar spirit. It is co-directed by Louis Clichy, who has credits on *WALL·E* (2008) and *Up* (2009), and actor-writer-director Alexandre Astier, who appeared in the terrible live-action *Asterix at the Olympic Games* (2008); and it is dubbed in English by such familiar actors as Jack Whitehall, Nick Frost, Catherine Tate and Jim Broadbent.

A drawback, though, is that the film frequently assumes familiarity with the original comic, which British youngsters may have missed. Created by René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo in 1959, *Asterix* – still running today with new artists – is



a cheery saga of French resistance transposed to 50 BC. A small village of doughty Gauls holds out against Roman occupation, thanks to a potion that gives them magical strength. The film assumes that viewers know why, for example, the rotund Obelix is *always* super-strong, and understand that the singing of the village bard Cacophonix is a terrifying weapon.

The Mansions of the Gods is based on one of the most pointed *Asterix* satires, in which Julius Caesar plots to force the Gauls to assimilate into Roman culture by building a modern town around them. The bewildered Gauls are pushed into the role of exotic rustics for the metropolitan crowd, and start playing to it, raising their fish prices ("Still cheaper than Rome!") and selling out furiously. While many comic adaptations, including Spielberg's *Tintin*, bodge two or more different strips together, *Mansions* finds natural ways to expand its witty story, with most of the Gauls tempted into the mansions. However, the cinema audience in Britain will probably consist of young children (and their tagalong parents), who may well be lost as to what the conflict is about.

Of course, kids may be satisfied with the many scenes of the Gauls biffing and bashing the silly Romans, leaving the satire to the adults. However, the film's lengthy climax mostly consists of characters chasing, clowning and thumping each other, and many adults may tune out of the action completely. As it happened, I saw the film twice; the climax seemed amusing the first time but very prolonged the second. It doesn't help that the mostly competent-to-good English dub turns charmlessly shouty at this point, nor that the sound balance (at least at the press screening) was excessively loud. ☹

Behemoth

France/Finland/Switzerland/The Netherlands/Hong Kong/South Korea 2015
Director: Zhao Liang

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

There are staggering images throughout *Behemoth*. Craters of dried-up mountain lakes are exploded to access hidden seams of coal and ore. Truck after truck dumps vast loads of rubble down a cliff-face, extending the cliff and obliterating more and more of the grassland below. There are extraordinary panoramas of now-lifeless crags, rocks and silt. We see men with next to no protective clothing working in an inferno of flame and molten ore. And the faces of men dying in hospital, now beyond emotion. Not least, a surreal vista of hundreds of pristine high-rise apartment buildings, painted in pastel shades of yellow and ochre, which sit waiting for residents who will likely never arrive. To find comparable documentary images of man-made devastation and derangement you'd have to look all the way back to Werner Herzog's *Lessons of Darkness* (1992).

This is new territory for Zhao Liang, until now best known for *vérité* reportage docs such as *Crime and Punishment* (2007) and *Petition* (2009). But Zhao (born in Liaoning, 1971) studied fine arts before he went to Beijing Film Academy, and an installation version of *Petition* at Documenta Madrid in 2012 was a big success, so the shift to a more conceptual and imagistic approach is not a complete surprise. By his own account he started shooting during a series of visits to Inner Mongolia, slowly gaining the trust of migrant workers and using a certain amount of subterfuge to get necessary permissions, but without any clear idea of how the material would be used or structured. The notion of modelling the film on Dante's *Divine Comedy* came later, and freed him from the impulse to build a storyline. He introduced figures representing Dante (a naked man dreaming, actually his sound recordist) and Virgil (a 'guide' carrying a mirror on his back), paraphrased verses from Dante to write and speak a narration, and turned his own journey through hell, purgatory and heaven into a cautionary, sensory experience.

The vision is quite overwhelming. Three captions at the end offer some statistical underpinning (Inner Mongolia has lost 20 per cent of its lakes in 30 years of mining; there have been many thousands of deaths from pneumoconiosis; and there really are hundreds of uninhabited 'ghost' cities throughout China) but in the main body of the film Zhao trusts the viewer to observe and make connections; there's no economic or ecological analysis as such. Nobody seen in the film speaks, but the images speak loudly enough: Zhao uses his images and his by-association editing to make the connections between explosion-based top-mining, deep-mining, environmental damage and respiratory diseases. Since Dante is notionally dreaming, Zhao allows himself some cutaways to broaden his points: a shot of a traditional, nomadic Mongol hunter-gatherer on horseback, a brief detour to a giant Buddha image which someone is building as penance for blowing up the mountains, a worker picking dead skin from his calloused hands. There are also short sequences showing Mongolian families around their yurts and trekking across the steppes.

Behemoth adds up to a considerable protest

Asterix: The Mansions of the Gods

Credits and Synopsis

Co-directed by

Alexandre Astier

Produced by

Philippe Bony

Thomas Valentin

Screenplay/

Adaptation/

Dialogue

Alexandre Astier

Based upon the

original work of

René Goscinny,

Albert Uderzo

Screenplay English

Translation

Geoffrey Greenshill

Editor

Soline Guyonneau

Art Direction

Thierry Fournier Mazal

Original Music

Philippe Rombi

Sound

Jean Goudier

Jean-Paul Hurier

Animation Director

Patrick Delage

©M6 Studio/

Belvision/M6 Films/

SNC/Les Éditions

Albert René/

Goscinny-Uderzo

Production

Companies

Produced by

M6 Studio

Co-produced by M6

Films, Belvision/

Grid Animation,

SNC, BNP Paribas

Fortis Film Finance

With the participation

of Canal+, Ciné+,

M6, W9, La Région

Wallonne

In association with

Les Éditions Albert

René, Mikros Image

With the support

of CNC, Tax Shelter

du Gouvernement

Fédéral Belge, Go

West Invest

With the participation

of Bruyère, B.S.C.A.,

Cabinet d'Avocat

Philippe Bossard,

Carrières de Lompret,

Green Energy 4

Seasons, Entreprises

Macors, Medecine

Générale MC Simeon,

Putman S.A.,

Caterpillar Belgium

S.A., I.M.P.S., Casa

Kafka Pictures

With the support

of Pôle Image de Liège,

Des Partenaires Tax

Shelter de Cinefrance

Supported by Screen

Flanders, Enterprise

Flanders, Flanders

in Action, Fladers

Audiovisual Fonds

Executive producer:

Media Valley

Executive Producer

Natalie Altmann

Voice Cast

English-language

version

Jack Whitehall

Asterix

Nick Frost

Obelix

Greg Davies

Somniferus

Matt Berry

Vitalstatistix

Catherine Tate

Dulcia

Harry Enfield

Anonymous

Jim Broadbent

Cesar

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Some screenings

presented in 3D

Distributor

Kaleidoscope

Entertainment

French theatrical title

Asterix Le Domaine

des Dieux

Gaul, 50 BC. Irrked by a single village that still holds out against Roman occupation, Julius Caesar plots to force its residents to assimilate by surrounding them with modern tenement blocks, called the Mansions of the Gods.

When the Romans endeavour to clear the wood near the village, the Gauls plant magic acorns, courtesy of the village's druid Getafix, which make the trees grow back instantly. The heroic warrior Asterix and his rotund ally Obelix try to free the Romans' slaves by giving them the village's magic potion, which bestows superhuman strength. However, the slaves opt to become the Romans' salaried workers and complete the buildings. Roman civilians pour

into the area. Realising that their prices are lower than Rome's, the Gauls eagerly turn their village into a tourist spot, to Asterix's dismay. Most Gauls are seduced by the Roman lifestyle, even moving into the mansions themselves. Getafix and Obelix (who's famished, because the boars he eats have been scared away by the building work) are captured.

Helped by a family of Romans who have befriended the Gauls, Asterix frees Getafix, and the latter races to make more magic potion. Before he can do so, the Gauls are captured and Caesar arrives to proclaim victory. A banquet's-worth of food is inadvertently thrown into the cellar holding Obelix, who explosively revives. The Gauls rally and destroy the mansions.

Black

Belgium 2015

Directors: Adil El Arbi, Bilall Fallah

Reviewed by Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff

The title *Black* is fittingly dark for this Belgian bruiser of a film, which pushes Shakespearean tragedy into the realm of present-day Europe and manages to take on issues of race and class in a way that feels particularly prescient at a time of turmoil for the continent, fostered in part by immigration worries.

Although essentially a *Romeo and Juliet*-style love story, *Black* (which is based on the popular *Black and Back* books by Flemish author Dirk Bracke) was always intended to have a political edge. Directors Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah share their Moroccan roots with cheeky, thick-browed Aboubakr Bensaihi, who plays 16-year-old Marwan; his razor-sharp comments to a family member about not being Flemish (the dominant ethnicity and language in Belgium, a country that sees Francophones marginalised) are matched by his 15-year-old lover Mavela's angry words to her mother, who, she says, will never get a job because her "Dutch [Flemish] is crap" and black graduates like her aren't seen as equal.

Marwan first spies Mavela (played by petite Martha Canga Antonio) at the police station. He has been caught for the crime that opens the movie – in a polished, quick-cutting scene, we've seen him sprinting down the streets of Brussels in blue-and-yellow Adidas tracksuit, having snatched a handbag for his postcode-named gang, the 1080s. Mavela has also been arrested, after attempting to steal alcohol for her ethnically exclusive gang, the Black Bronx. The pair have instant chemistry, replicated later in an authentic-feeling candlelit sex scene. But, at their first meeting, Mavela tells Marwan that she doesn't date Moroccan men: "So if your sister or cousin came home with a black guy, you wouldn't mind?" she asks. "It's really not the same," he responds. Despite the intelligent portrayal of one black police officer, this first mention of black men sets the tone for the rest of the film.

El Arbi and Fallah, who have recently been chosen to direct the fourth Eddie Murphy *Beverly Hills Cop* instalment, reportedly spent months researching real gangs and street casting nearly all their actors, so the lack of nuance in their depiction of the black gang members is disappointing. These young men are shown as persistent rapists and grossly brutal narcissists, dealing drugs and violent to women. "Tell the brat to calm down or I'll fuck his mother," one Bronx member tells his pregnant girlfriend. The Moroccans in 1080, on the other hand, come across as petty, childish delinquents. At times, then, it's difficult to understand why the obviously intelligent Mavela has joined this patriarchal gang. Her reasoning, she



Martha Canga Antonio, Emmanuel Tahon



Scarred for life: *Behemoth*

against practices that annihilate an eco-system and ravage human health, but framed in such a way that no Beijing censor could object to it. 'Big Daddy' Xi Jinping continues to crack down on independent voices in China, including such seemingly marginal figures as independent filmmakers, and there's no doubt that many indie directors have been silenced. In this harsh cultural/political climate, filmmakers who want to go on working face difficult choices: either they go completely 'underground' (like Ju Anqi with *Poet on a Business Trip*) or they adopt what Brian Eno would call 'oblique strategies' to avoid bringing the authorities down on their heads. Zhao Liang, whose later films have all been co-financed by France, carefully sidestepped direct challenges to the legitimacy

of communist rule in his *vérité* films – even *Petition*, which shows the hopeless quests of those seeking official redress for wrongs they've suffered – and his shift here to a more 'aesthetic' and distanced style undoubtedly reflects great circumspection on his part. He has found a way to be critical of an appalling status quo without leaving himself vulnerable to censure. By any measure, it's an impressive achievement.

The images in *Behemoth* would be as much at home in a gallery as in a cinema; in a sense, the film revives an old tradition of poetic documentary, and does so with rather more backbone than recent films from the 'sensory lab' at Harvard. If that means that Zhao will be more a visual artist than a filmmaker in future, so much the richer for his audience.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Sylvie Blum
Narrative Script
Zhao Liang
Sylvie Blum
Loosely based
on *The Divine
Comedy* by Dante
Cinematographer
Zhao Liang

Editing

Fabrice Rouaud
Original Music
Alain Mahe
Huzi
Sound Recording
Chen Yao
Hu Mengchu
Cao Rui
Li Guocheng

©INA - ARTE France

Production
Companies
ARTE France &
INA present a film
by Zhao Liang
A co-production of
INA with ARTE France
with the participation
of yle, RTS - Radio

Télévision Suisse,
Centre National de la
Cinématographie et
de l'Image animée
with the support of La
PROCIREP - Société
des Producteurs
L'ANGO, IDFA
Bertha Fund, HAF
Hong Kong Asia Film

Financing Forum,
Fushan Features,
Busan International
Film Festival, ACF
Asian Cinema Fund,
Asian Network of
Documentary (AND)
BIFF Mecenat Fund

In Colour

[1.85:1] Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films/ICA

A documentary essay, mostly shot in Inner Mongolia, about the environmental devastation caused by the mining and steel-working industries – and about the cost to the health of the countless migrant workers from other parts of China who staff those industries. Modelling his structure on 'The Divine Comedy', Zhao Liang assumes the persona of Dante (represented on screen by a naked man curled up in the foetal position) exploring this dream-like world under the guidance of a Virgil figure (represented by a man carrying a mirror on his back). The long, opening 'hell' section looks first at the dynamiting of surface rocks to expose seams of coal and ore (and the consequent creation of new 'cliffs' of unwanted rubble), then

at deep-mining, and finally at metal-smelting and steel-moulding plants. There are glimpses of the squalid home lives of migrant workers, and of the nomadic Mongolian shepherd families who are fast losing their grassland and lakes. The short 'purgatory' section looks at the blighted lives of workers who have been hospitalised with pneumoconiosis. The closing 'heaven' section looks at a new 'ghost' city built in the countryside (one of many such in China) which remains unoccupied but is kept scrupulously clean. Zhao's final narration reflects that he hasn't been dreaming but looking at facts: the Behemoth-like 'monster' which feeds on these industries and the workers who keep them going is modern society itself.

explains to her mother, is that she has found a place where she fits in. And there is one joyous scene where you see the Black Bronx at a concert, revelling in their blackness, drinking, dancing, dressed in dashikis.

For British viewers, the immediate comparison is with Menhaj Huda's gritty film about troubled teens in west London, *Kidulthood* (2006), but El Arbi and Fallah's film takes things a step further. In *Kidulthood* we see blowjobs, in *Black* a horrifically graphic rape scene that culminates in a shot of Mavela's blood spilling down the drain as she showers after the attack. Guns, not baseball bats, are the lethal weapons of choice here.

Black is only El Arbi and Fallah's second feature following 2014's *Image*, and it's clear they fully deserved their Discovery award at last year's Toronto festival. This is a swiftly paced, expertly shot ride, with some well-drawn character development. Hopefully the directors' next effort will manage to avoid racial stereotypes. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Frank Van Passel
Bert Hamelinck
Ivy Vanhaecke

Screenplay

Nele Meirhaeghe
Adil El Arbi
Bilal Fallah
Hans Herbots

Based on the novels
Black & Back by
Dirk Bracke

Cinematographer

Robrecht Heyvaert

Editors

Adil El Arbi
Bilal Fallah

Production Design

Stijn Verhoeven

Music

Hannes De Maeyer

Sound Design

& Sound Mix

Fabien Pochet

Costume Designer

Nina Caspari

©Caviar, Climax

Films, RTBF

Production

Companies

Caviar & a team

productions present

In co-production

with Climax Films,

Eén & RTBF

(Télévision belge)

With the support

of the Flanders

Audiovisual Fund

(VAF), Centre

du Cinéma et de

l'Audiovisuel de la

Fédération Wallonie-

Bruxelles et Voo, la

Wallonie et la région

de Bruxelles-Capitale

In collaboration

with KFD, Telenet

With the support

of the MEDIA

Programme of the

European Union, the

Belgian Tax Shelter

A film by Adil El

Arbi & Bilal Fallah

With the support of

Flanders Image,

In co-operation with

Telenet, KFD, the

Belgian Tax Shelter,

the Department of

Culture, Youth, Sport

and Media of the

Flemish Community,

DADECO

Produced by Caviar

Co-produced by

Climax Films,

RTBF (Télévision

belge), Eén

Executive produced

by A Team

Productions

Executive

Produced by

Hendrik Verthé

Kobe Van

Steenbergh

Hans Herbots

Cast

Martha Canga

Antonio

Mavela

Aboubakr Bensaihi

Marwan

Emmanuel Tahon

X

Théo Kabeya

Notorious

Natascha Boyamba

Justelle

Glodie Lombi

Angela

Axel Massudi

CMM

Brandon Massudi

Alonzo

Jérémy Zagba

Don

Soufiane Chilal

Nassim

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Vertigo Films

Brotherhood

United Kingdom

Director: Noel Clarke

Certificate 15 104m 30s

See Industry,
page 14

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

Kingsley Amis tells us that the word 'brutalise' has been rendered 'unusable' through misuse, but there is still a case for it. Noel Clarke's 'hood trilogy

– he wrote all three, and directed the second two – is about characters who have been brutalised in the true sense, as in 'made brutal' by exposure to violence. This third film, coming a long time after *Adulthood* (2008), is about brutalised men trying to leave their violent pasts behind; except when it's revelling in violence and the spoils of crime.

Clarke plays Sam Peel, who went to prison between the events of *Kidulthood* (2006) and *Adulthood* for the killing of rival gang member Trife and spent much of the second film fending off revenge attacks. Now married to lawyer Kayla (Shanika Warren-Markland), with whom he has children, and comfortably off, Sam has left the streets behind but is frustrated: as an ex-convict he can only find menial employment, and insists on working four jobs in order to fulfil his allotted role as 'breadwinner', even against Kayla's entreaties. The working out of this situation, in some sense a domestication of the masculine code of the streets, might itself have made a decent premise for a film; but, like Sam, the narrative is inexorably drawn back towards gang violence whenever Sam's fragile masculinity is directly challenged or stirred. Trife's uncle Curtis (Cornell John), who has passed the time since *Adulthood* in prison, wants revenge again, albeit in a rather convoluted form.

Instead of simply seeking to kill Sam, Curtis now wants to turn him back into a 'rude boy', on pain of death – and then kill him. Most of *Brotherhood*, like its predecessor, is a blood-and-thunder melodrama (though actual blood is in short supply, despite all the knifings) in which bad guys are shot in the back by unseen snipers just as they are about to prevail, and grandmothers are thrown off Trelick Tower balconies. There is a lot of plot, and events move fast, almost too



Gangster angst: Noel Clarke

fast for doubts about plausibility and logic to intrude, though not quite; but too fast for much depth of characterization or social context.

One of the better scenes involves Sam's comic-foil friend Henry (Arnold Ocheng) – who has also left the streets and found domestic contentment – persuading a young roadman (played by the grime MC Stormzy) not to attack him with a hammer. The scene is better not because it's plausible (it isn't), but because it cuts through the glamour of the criminal underworld to reveal the pathos; and because its comic patness – Stormzy's character decides to become a graphic designer, just like that – undercuts its obvious message.

On the whole, however, Clarke as director all too clearly relishes the glamour: killers walking down nightclub corridors in slow motion, gleaming jeeps, indentured molls in fancy underwear or nothing at all. Sam has to become a rude boy, committing brutal acts to protect himself and his family; but violence not only neutralises external threats – it somehow resolves his domestic difficulties as well, without any sign of brutalisation. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Jason Maza

Noel Clarke

Gina Powell

Maggie Montieth

George Isaac

Written by

Noel Clarke

Director of

Photography

Aaron Reid

Editor

Tommy Boulding

Production Design

Monica Black

Music

Tom Linden

Sound Mixer

Mario Mooney

Costume Designer

Andy Blake

©Brotherhood Film

Company Ltd

Production

Companies

Lionsgate presents

an Unstoppable

Entertainment

production

in association with

Dignity Group Co.

and Cipher Films

A Noel Clarke film

Executive Producers

Josephine Rose

Chris Reed

Damian Jones

Zygi Kamasa

Nick Manzi

Nicola Pearcey

Marco Costa

Marcello Moscarello

Cast

Arnold Ocheng

Henry Okocha

David Ajala

Detective Desmond

Lynch, 'Buds'

Cornell John

Curtis Gayle

Shanika Warren-

Markland

Kayla

Jason Maza

Daley

Michael 'Stormzy'

Omari

Yardz

Red Madrell

Alisa

Fady Elsayed

wino

Noel Clarke

Sam Peel

Daniel Anthony

Royston Peel

Tonia Sotiropoulou

Jenette

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Lionsgate UK

West London, the present. Singer Royston Peel is shot and wounded during a gig. The next morning, his brother Sam, who has served a prison sentence for killing another man but is now happily married to Kayla, is seduced by a stranger, Janette. Royston's assailants threaten Sam's family and tell him where to find them. There, in a large house, Sam meets gang boss Daley – and Curtis, the man whose nephew he killed, and who tried to have him killed in retaliation. Daley and Curtis attempt to blackmail Sam into returning to his criminal ways; when he refuses, they show Kayla a video of him having sex with Janette, then kill his mother. Sam vows revenge, but is caught when trying to steal a pistol from Brick, the manager of his boxing gym; Brick tells Sam that he wants revenge on the mysterious Mooks, the top man in Daley's gang, for raping his sister. Having made common cause, Sam recruits his friend Henry as driver, and works his way up through Daley's gang, using violence to get information.

Sam calls in a police raid on Daley's new headquarters, but Daley escapes. Sam agrees to meet Curtis for a fight to the death, but then refuses to kill him; instead, a police marksman does. Sam goes to Daley's house but again refuses to kill his enemy, leaving that task to Brick. It transpires that Daley is Mooks. Sam is reconciled with Kayla.

Café Society

Director: Woody Allen
Certificate 12A 96m 6s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

In *Hard Times*, Studs Terkel's 1970 oral history of the Great Depression, there's a chapter dedicated to those who lived in (or adjacent to) high society in Chicago and New York. Jerome Zerbe, who spent the 1930s photographing the denizens of El Morocco and the Rainbow Room, claimed that he never saw any breadlines in Manhattan (nor heard them discussed in his circle), summarising the decade as "a glamorous, glittering moment".

Woody Allen takes much the same tack in *Café Society*, which is replete with eye-poppingly gorgeous colours, polished surfaces, designer furs and not much else. (The sole reason for the period seems to be indulging in fun *mise en scène*.) Bobby Dorfman (Jesse Eisenberg, wonderfully performing the neurotic Woody role) is a Bronx-based naïf seeking employment with his mother's brother Phil (Steve Carrell), a Hollywood muckety-muck who makes frequent and casual references to the glitterati he's in charge of shepherding. Never quite witty or interesting, these references come off like some torpid in-theatre game of Trivial Pursuit: which RKO film did Howard Hawks direct with Joel McCrea in the lead? What role is Spencer Tracy about to play? Like Inez's Tea Party father in Allen's *Midnight in Paris* (2011), most of the characters in *Café Society* seem to have been scribbled on the back of a cocktail napkin. (To wonder even temporarily if this is intentional is to give the writer-director far too much credit.)

Allen – who intermittently narrates the action with an equal measure of pithiness – attempts to offset this trivial and glitzy world by putting self-imposed heartbreak at the centre of the action. Struggling to adjust to California life ("They give you a coffee right when you sit down, before the orange juice!"), Bobby is shown around Los Angeles by Uncle Phil's secretary Vonnie (Kristen Stewart), going to the movies and "a real joint" Mexican restaurant. Instantly smitten with Vonnie's good-natured, Nebraska-born vibe, Bobby pursues her with a Dean Martin-esque tenacity, even though she has a boyfriend – who turns out to be Phil. After Phil fails to leave his wife for her, Vonnie gives in to Bobby's goofy charms, and they decide to marry and move to his native New York. These plans are dashed when, after learning that Bobby



All that glitters: Jesse Eisenberg, Blake Lively

was the one who replaced him, Phil wages an impressive campaign to win Vonnie back.

Heartbroken, Bobby goes home to New York, helps his gangster brother Ben (Corey Stoll) turn his ill-gotten club into a haunt for (you guessed it) café society, and marries a shiksa divorcee also named Veronica (Blake Lively), who finds Bobby's Jewishness "exotic". ("I wouldn't mind if you had horns," she coos upon their initial meeting.) When Vonnie and Phil stop by Bobby's club a year or so later, old feelings re-emerge, but both are too comfortable with their respective lives to do anything about it, and end the film apart, sadly gazing off into space while their clueless spouse asks what the matter is.

Though there is an undeniable sadness to Vonnie and Bobby's predicament that in some ways echoes *Amie Hall* (1977), the sheer amount of *stuff* surrounding their doomed love diminishes any potential emotional impact (mostly the volume of lazy, self-deprecating jokes about being Jewish, either stated or made through stereotypical characters). Ben's street education and murderous exploits are well documented (and prove to be both thrilling and darkly comic), but the rest of Bobby's family – his butcher pa, his sky-is-falling ma, his passive-aggressive sister and his proto-existentialist, commie brother-in-law – prove to be as inconsequential and selfish as the sophists that frequent Bobby's (obviously segregated) nightclub. Sadly, this seems to be the depth of social commentary Allen can manage. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Letty Aronson
Stephen Tenenbaum
Edward Walson

Written by

Woody Allen

Cinematographer

Vittorio Storaro

Editor

Alisa Lepseter

Production Designer

Santo Loquasto

Sound Mixer

David J. Schwartz

Costume Design

Suzy Benzinger

Production Companies

Amazon Studios
presents in
association with
Gravier Productions

a Perdido production

Executive Producers

Adam B. Stern
Marc I. Stern
Ronald L. Chez

Cast

Jeanne Berlin
Rose Dorfman
Steve Carrell
Phil Stern
Jesse Eisenberg
Bobby Dorfman
Blake Lively
Veronica
Parker Posey
Rad Taylor
Kristen Stewart
Vonnice
Corey Stoll
Ben Dorfman
Ken Stott

Marty Dorfman

Anna Camp

Candy

Stephen Kunken

Leonard

Sari Lennick

Evelyn

Paul Schneider

Steve

Edward Hyland

Bobby's neighbour

narrator

Woody Allen

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Warner Bros. Pictures
International (UK)

Los Angeles, 1935. Hollywood agent Phil Stern gives his nephew Bobby Dorfman a job. Bobby dislikes the falseness around him, but falls for his uncle's secretary Vonnie, even though she tells Bobby she has a boyfriend. Her boyfriend is in fact the married Phil. Phil promises Vonnie he'll leave his wife for her, but breaks things off on their first anniversary. Vonnie and Bobby begin a relationship and become engaged. When Phil finds out about their engagement, he begins to pursue Vonnie again; she goes back to him.

Bobby returns to his native New York, where he helps his gangster brother Ben with his club, Hangover, renaming it Le Tropique. Socialites and celebrities begin to frequent the club. Bobby marries fashionable divorcee Veronica, and they have a baby. Ben is arrested and sent to the electric chair. Vonnie and Phil visit Bobby; Bobby and Vonnie rekindle their relationship but decide not to run away together.

Cell

Director: Tod Williams
Certificate 15 97m 40s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

Stephen King famously objected to the liberties taken with his novel *The Shining* in Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film adaptation. Yet in co-adapting (with Adam Alleca) his 2006 novel *Cell* for the big screen, King has licensed himself to introduce substantial changes to the original, and the results are likely to wrong-foot anyone coming to the film with expectations of a straightforward narrative path, and send viewers racing backwards to reconcile the various plot strands into a coherent whole.

Viewed on the simplest level, Tod Williams's film is akin to David Bruckner, Dan Bush and Jacob Gentry's *The Signal* (2007): a technophobic nightmare in which a mysterious pulse suddenly emitted by mobile phones turns users into murderous maniacs. Yet the initial resemblance of *Cell*'s 'phoners' to virally infected, rage-fuelled, noughties-style zombies soon gives way to odder behaviours, as they evolve before our eyes, forming strange hive-mind flocks and beginning to broadcast as well as receive. Trying to get a grip on these protean creatures runs parallel with any attempts to pin down the film's meaning. For while *Cell* is obviously satirising our enslavement to digital devices and the groupthink this can lead to, it simultaneously implies that the source of the 'phoner' outbreak may be protagonist Clay Riddell himself (John Cusack, in his third King adaptation after *Stand by Me* and *1408*), a graphic novelist whose demonic iconography has begun invading the dreams and haunting the collective unconscious of his fellow non-phoners.

Clay comes with his own demons. As he races cross-country to his estranged wife and beloved son, we learn that he walked out on them a year back to become an independent artist – a decision that he has been regretting ever since. Key to *Cell* is this conflicting desire to be an individual and to belong to a group – and it seems significant that the mind-merging pulse should strike immediately after Clay attempts to reconnect with the family life he'd previously regarded as a dark time of co-dependent drudgery and despised corporate design work. His fellow traveller Tom (Samuel L. Jackson, Cusack's co-star in *1408*) may see the remaining non-phoners as being "like bugs with the dumb luck to avoid the giant's boot", but the impression persists that Clay is more epicentre than arbitrary survivor of the outbreak – and that his bid to return to the domestic treadmill of his past life is



With this ring: *Cell*

also a circular journey back into the dark. Amid the horrors of its monstrous imagery and its disarmingly unsentimental approach to characters' deaths, *Cell* also offers considerable black humour via its ironic soundtrack choices (*Ring My Bell, You'll Never Walk Alone*), its dry dialogue and its setting of climactic scenes in and around an ice-cream truck. As Clay makes new 'friends', engages in literal flame wars and (beta) tests the new system to its limits, he might after all be less an off-the-grid rebel than just another cog in the wheel, or cell in the organic network. And where Clay was never able to finish his own graphic novel, the film splits itself into more than one resolution, as an individual's unravelling psyche and a global techno-apocalypse end up running the same circuit. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Richard Saperstein
Michael Benaroya
Brian Witten
Shara Kay
Screenplay
Stephen King
Adam Alleca
Based on the book
by Stephen King
**Director of
Photography**
Michael Simmonds
Editor
Jacob Craycroft
**Production
Designer**
John Collins
Music
Marcelo Zarvos
Sound
Warren Shaw
Costume Designer
Lorraine Coppin

**Production
Companies**
Saban Films and
Benaroya Pictures
and International
Film Trust present
in association with
120dB Films and
co-international
sales representative
Cargo Entertainment

A Genre Company
and Benaroya
Pictures production
**Executive
Producers**
John Cusack
Stephen Hays
Peter Graham
Ben Sachs
Paddy Cullen
Edward Mokhtarian
Armen Aghaiean
Laurence Freed
Tyler Hawes
Brian Pope
Geno Tazioli
Xavier Gens
Marina Grasic
Jan Korbelin

Cast
John Cusack
Clayton Riddell, 'Clay'
Samuel L. Jackson
Tom McCourt
Isabelle Fuhrman
Alice Maxwell
Owen Teague
Jordan
Clark Sarullo
Sharon Riddell
Anthony Reynolds
Ray Huizenga
Erin Elizabeth
Burns

Denise
Stacy Keach
Charles Ardi
Ethan Andrew
Casto
Johnny Riddell

**Dolby Digital
In Colour**
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Signature
Entertainment

The Confession Living the War on Terror

United Kingdom 2016
Director: Ashish Ghadiali

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

The so-called War on Terror birthed some strange affinities. Not just the Blair/Bush bromance – its intensity recently affirmed by the Chilcot report and Blair's *noir-ish* promise, "I will be with you, whatever" – but also the Western rightwing conservatives compelled to express support for feminism and gay rights in defiance of Islamic fundamentalism, and the converse push by some leftist western liberals to condone radical Islam as a bulwark against American imperialism. Ashish Ghadiali's film centres on a poster boy for this mess of counterintuitive affiliations. Former Guantánamo Bay inmate Moazzam Begg is a conservative Muslim with the friendly patronage of Russell Brand, and a supporter of al-Qaeda (its principles if not all of its practices) beloved by the Stop the War Coalition. Is Begg the enemy within, or a healthy embodiment of Britain's religious pluralism? Ghadiali pursues these questions with doggedness and without sensationalism, largely through a long-form interview with Begg himself, which covers his background, his account of his activities before and around 9/11, and his philosophy regarding religious identity, terrorism and multiculturalism.

With Errol Morris's intensive interviews as a model, and recent TV and film meditations on justice such as *The Fear of 13* (2015), *Making a Murderer* (2015) and *The People v. O.J. Simpson* (2016) having whetted appetites for the re-evaluation of real cases, Ghadiali permits the articulate, measured and personable Begg to tell his own story, leaving the audience to ponder



Internal debate: Moazzam Begg

body language and consistency. Was Begg sympathetic to Muslim resistance to western-led forces in various parts of the world, and in contact with organisers thereof? Certainly; he acknowledges as much. Did his sympathy extend to active support for terrorist acts? Not according to him, or to any court of law. Would either suspicion justify his incarceration without trial or his subjection to torture? That depends where you sit on the moral imperatives of the 'War on Terror', but unsurprisingly Begg and his supporters vehemently contend not.

But is it even a question of what he did, or of what has been proven? When Ghadiali proposes that the security services were sure to have an interest in him given his affiliations, Begg responds, "Yes and no. A lot of the things I've spoken to you about, they didn't know about." Begg's father, Azmat Begg, also distinguishes between what his son has done and what anyone knew he had done, contending that Moazzam was harassed simply for being religious, before clarifying that "it was not proved otherwise". There's a more straightforward case of linguistic slippage when investigators listening in on Begg's private conversations mistranslate the Arabic for "helping the oppressed" as the name of a hitherto unknown jihadi group. And when Moazzam relates, with practised fluency, arguments he says he had with an al-Qaeda member while incarcerated, he almost seems to be articulating his own internal debate between violent and non-violent jihad.

So at odds are the potential interpretations of Begg's account that the very title *The Confession* will seem straightforward to some viewers and bitingly ironic to others. And yet Ghadiali's film doesn't seem deliberately ambiguous or evasive. Rather, it asserts itself confidently as not only a portrait of one unusually headstrong and divisive figure, but also an interrogation of the very nature of truth-telling, freedom and responsibility – one that becomes particularly pertinent in the context of the Chilcot report. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
James Rogan
**Director of
Photography**
Keidrych Wasley
Film Editors
Nsé Asuquo
Simon Barker
Production Design
Beck Rainford
Music
Nitin Sawhney
Location Sound
Will Hadley

©The British Film

Institute, Rogan
Productions Limited
**Production
Companies**
BFI, BBC Storyville,
Shoobox Films and
Creative England
present a Rogan
Productions
production
Made with the
support of the
BFI's Film Fund
**Executive
Producers**
Roger Graef

Kate Townsend
Nick Fraser
Oli Harbottle
Mary Burke
Caroline Cooper
Charles
Paul Webster

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

A documentary in which Moazzam Begg relates how he struggled with his identity as a British Pakistani teenager in Birmingham, and how visits to Bosnia and Chechnya during the conflicts of the 1990s affirmed his Islamic faith. He came to the attention of the UK security forces, and was arrested in 2000. Thereafter he moved to Afghanistan, studying with members of al-Qaeda. After the 9/11 attacks, he was arrested and imprisoned, for a year at Bagram and a further two years at Guantánamo Bay. He signed a confession declaring himself a member of al-Qaeda, in order, he says, to escape execution and secure a trial. Released in 2005, Begg became a prominent commentator on Muslim affairs and the 'War on Terror'. He sued the British government over his treatment at Guantánamo Bay, and obtained a financial settlement. In 2014, he was arrested again for aiding rebels in Syria; he was released after seven months when the case collapsed.

Begg ends by firmly locating responsibility for current Islamic terrorism with the architects of the War on Terror, but declares his support for the idea of a multicultural Britain.

US, present day. Illustrator Clay Riddell calls his estranged wife Sharon and son Johnny. After his phone battery runs out, a pulse transforms phone users into crazed killers. Clay is unaffected; he sets out for Sharon's home with fellow survivors Tom and teen Alice. Infected 'phoners' start flocking together and acting in hive-mind unison. Clay, Tom and Alice help headmaster Charles and pupil Jordan to set fire to phoners sleeping in a playing field, but Charles is killed in the ensuing explosion. The four survivors have nightmares involving 'Raggedy', a red-hooded figure from Clay's unfinished graphic novel. In a bar, Alice and other survivors are killed by the now nocturnally active phoners. Campers Ray and Denise warn that supposed safe zone Kashwak is in fact a trap. Believing that phoners are in his head, Ray gives Clay his ice-cream van and a phone detonator before blowing himself up. After finding that Sharon is a phoner, Clay heads alone in the van to rescue Johnny from Kashwak. There, in a circle of phoners, Clay confronts Raggedy and detonates the explosive-rigged van. Clay heads off with Johnny after Tom, Jordan and Denise. Or is the already infected Clay just imagining it, while shuffling along zombie-like in the circle of other phoners?

The Fall

United Kingdom 2016
Director: Daniel Gordon
Certificate 12A 95m 51s

Reviewed by Sophie Mayer

It's US track-and-field coach Brooks Johnson who best captures *The Fall's* narrative, which intercuts between the South African Zola Budd, who ran for Britain at the 1984 Olympics, and the American Mary Decker, whom he trained. "They were pitted against each other from the jump," he says, "but if they could meet, they would see the sisterhood." As the film reveals, the contest between the athletes was not just sporting. All-American sweetheart Decker was expected to win a proxy Cold War against the Soviet dominance of women's athletics, while 18-year-old Budd was booed by anti-apartheid protesters for breaking the boycott by taking British citizenship.

The film builds towards the fateful 3,000-metre Olympic final at the Los Angeles Coliseum in August 1984, when Budd overtook Decker halfway through and Decker tripped and fell on the infield, and it entwines the athletes' narratives to suggest this was a fateful entanglement created by the parallels between their personal lives. But the complexity of Budd's situation isn't balanced by Decker's, however much the film tries to match the media pressure on her with the baying press packs that followed Budd from her first race in the UK.

It's in exposing the role of the media that the film is most powerful, in particular showing the craven role of the *Daily Mail* in garnering UK citizenship for Budd to raise its own profile. Johnson – the documentary's star analyst and screen presence – cuttingly describes the sports journalists criticising both runners as "looking down from Mount Olympus". But while the film exposes how the media narrative was constructed, it does little itself to challenge the heroic-failure format familiar from sports documentaries and features: dependent on broadcast news footage and home videos for the majority of its history, at points it is redolent of a TV packaged clips show. Its semi-staged present-day interviews with Decker (with a group of young runners) and Budd (with her former nanny Maria) are the visual complement to the use of a lounge piano cover of Tears for Fears' 'Mad World' on the soundtrack.

The present-day conversations pay off at the film's close, however, when the filmmakers bring both women back to the Coliseum for the first time since 1984, for what appears to be their first personal conversation. Their comments as they are being driven to the stadium separately highlight the differences between them: Decker, who describes the race as "very



Back on track: Mary Decker

traumatic for me", says she wants "closure" for herself; Budd wants to ask Decker how she has fared, and whether she is still running.

While Budd is the more self-aware speaker, the film contests – via anti-apartheid campaigner Sam Ramsamy – her continued claims that she was unaware of the operations of apartheid while growing up in South Africa. But because the operations of apartheid are relegated to 30 seconds of grainy archive footage at the start of the film, Ramsamy's arguments are outweighed by the spectacle of packs of adult men running after a six-stone, barefoot girl, booing and shouting "racist".

Like the young women who were thrust into the international spotlight when they just wanted to run, the film, wanting to tell their story, finds itself caught on the horns of geopolitical situations to which it can't do justice. But it does a fine job of tracking how Budd and Decker found themselves in that spotlight through the manipulations of rapacious, nationalist media in both the UK and US. It's that framework that makes this more than what risks, at times, becoming a prurient, forced trip down memory lane for two evidently vulnerable women. "I'm still not sure if I'm doing the right thing," Budd tells the camera in her first interview. Where *The Fall* is most powerful is in showing clearly how both she and Decker were pushed. 

The Founders

USA 2016
Directors: Charlene Fisk, Carrie Schrader

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

It seems unlikely that a sport as unegalitarian as golf – right up there with yachting and show jumping – would break down gender barriers. Yet the Ladies Professional Golf Association, founded in the US in 1950, is one of the world's longest-running women's professional sports associations, and has attracted skilled female athletes of all races and classes the world over. (Unlike its male counterpart, the LPGA never barred African Americans from playing, and actively boycotted courses that didn't permit them to enter the clubhouse.)

The story and 13 personalities behind the LPGA's creation are presented almost competently in Charlene Fisk and Carrie Schrader's documentary through interviews with the surviving founders, archival footage and reenactments. Given that the film's subjects are now all elderly women who stood up against sexism years before the civil-rights movements of the 1960s, there's a higher-than-usual amount of candidness running through their testimony. Though this edges dangerously close to a type of backbiting all too commonly associated with women, it's also a refreshing (and more holistic) alternative to the typical aura of hagiography that permeates most talking-head documentaries. According to her former colleagues/competitors, Mildred Ella 'Babe' Didrikson Zaharias, a two-time Olympic gold medallist in track and field who became the face of female golf, was driven by her ego, lust for fame and rivalry with Louise Suggs and Patty Berg, but also by a profound love of the game. (One of her last requests before dying of colon cancer at the age of 45 was to go to a golf course.) This warts-and-all intimacy is also a by-product of the financial realities of the LPGA's early years: without any sponsors, the women were forced to perform maintenance on courses themselves, do all the promotional work (including modelling clothes at the clubhouse before they played) and carpool between tournaments (they even devised a system whereby they would hold different-coloured ping-pong paddles out of one car's window to signal what type of pit-stop they needed to make). 



Teed off: Bettye Danoff

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Karen Emsley
Director of Photography
Michael Timney
Film Editor
Matt Wylie
Original Music
Tim Attack
Location Sound
Andy Boag

©Hillside Productions
Limited
Production

Companies
Sky Atlantic presents
GCI Film presents
A Hillside production
in association with
Passion Pictures
Executive Producers
John Battsek
James Quinn
Celia Taylor

In Colour
[1.85:1]
Distributor

Picturehouse
Entertainment

Bloemfontein, the present. Zola Budd, an international sensation when she broke the 5,000-metre women's record in 1983 at the age of 17, now runs ultra-marathons. Mary Decker, against whom Budd controversially ran in the 1984 Olympics, talks to a group of young runners in California. Using archival footage and interviews with family members, competitors, coaches and journalists, the film looks back at Budd's and Decker's careers leading up to Decker's fateful fall on the track during the 3,000-metre final in Los Angeles, and examines its ramifications for both athletes within the historical contexts of the Cold War and apartheid.

Despite all of these fascinating titbits, there's still something sort of clueless about the entire enterprise. Aside from some formal sloppiness (a few rough sound edits), tinkly piano music during the sad bits, badly acted reenactments that illustrate unnecessary or boring anecdotes, lack of identifying text on interviewees (making it difficult to impossible to identify who's who for most of the documentary), a muddled timeline and non-sequitur soundbites that are just left hanging, the founders don't always offer up the best insights on their profession or society at large. Sometimes this means retreading ground covered previously, or simply generic statements that evince a lack of awareness. While discussing an incident where Suggs, at the time one of the top three female golfers in the US, was barred entrance to a clubhouse on a course she was playing on in 1941, fellow founder Shirley Spork explains, "Golf was a rich man's game. You couldn't compete unless you were part of an organisation or private club. It was very closed." Given that this is still largely true of the sport (save for the advent of urban driving ranges and cheaper courses), there's not much point in rattling off such details, which would've been better explained by a different player or golf historian.

Though it's relatable to every woman simply because of its repeated emphasis on 'no you can't because you're a girl' incidents, *The Founders* is never captivating. Given how much women's participation in golf has altered the widely held belief that women can't be true athletes – either because we're generally tinier than men or because of some smirking, inchoate associations with monthlies – it's especially unfortunate. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Phoebe Brown
Charlene Fisk
Carrie Schrader

Written by

Dana Lee
Carrie Schrader
Maureen Simpson

Directors of Photography

Kevan Ward
Charlene Fisk

Editor

Charlene Fisk

Production Design

Rebecca Biechteler
Maggie McBride

Composer

Dan Murtagh

Sound Production

Mixers
Jake Slaney
Keith Thomas
Jay White

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Production Company

Mighty Fine Pictures

Executive Producers

Stacy Lewis
Karrie Webb

Harrison Fisk
Mike McBride

Margaret Capossela

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Distributor

Kaleidoscope Film
Distribution

A documentary incorporating found footage, reenactments and interviews with the surviving founders of the Ladies Professional Golf Association. Founded by 13 women in the US in 1950, the LPGA grew out of the Women's Professional Golf Association, which had folded the year before. The LPGA organised its own tournaments, with members driving cross-country to various courses, raising funds for prizes and promoting women's participation in the sport, often doing publicity events that downplayed their sportsmanship. After the death of Babe Didrikson Zaharias, one of the top players and an early superstar of the sport, the LPGA struggled to coordinate but eventually became more stable and visible. Despite such gains, gender discrepancy continues to this day: top-ranked male players win five times as much prize money.

400 Days

USA 2015

Director: Matt Osterman

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

It's no great achievement to discombobulate an audience. A middling filmmaker can do it just as surely as a good one, and more profoundly as well. Matt Osterman's smartest move in *400 Days* is choosing a genre – let's call it the post-*Twilight Zone*-sci-fi-mindfuck – where conceptual rigour and basic laziness can seem interchangeable, especially for viewers who like to feel they're being jerked around.

They'll get their money's worth here. The film sends four astronauts (including broody Brandon Routh and bulky Dane Cook) underground for a 'social experiment' mimicking the physical and psychological demands of deep-space exploration. No sooner have the parameters of their mission been strenuously explained than Osterman cues us to think something's up, and while there's some fun in trying to figure out which well-worn big twist is being saved for the ending, the good vibes dissipate with the same deadly steadiness as the module's oxygen. The low production values aren't the issue so much as the pallid acting, awkward pacing and complete lack of originality in sequences that are meant to be hallucinatory (nobody is expecting *Solaris* here, but we're talking sub-*Event Horizon* stuff). A scene where Cook jokingly quotes 2001: *A Space Odyssey* suggests that Osterman imagines himself within some larger tradition, but chasing after Stanley Kubrick (or Rod Serling) is usually just a way to point up how far behind you truly are. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Gabriel Cowan
John Suits

Written by

Matt Osterman

Director of Photography

Bo Hakala

Edited by

Nicholas Larrabure
Gabriel Cowan

Production Designer

Traci Hays

Original Score

Sean McMahon
Original Music
Wojciech Golczewski

Production Sound Mixers

Chris Polczynski
Scott Kaser

Costume Designer

Martina Jeans

Stunt/Fight Co-ordinator

Van Ayasit

©Pandemic, LLC

Production

Companies

Content Media
& XLrator Media
present

From New Artists
Alliance

A Cowan/Suits
Production

Executive Producers

Curtis Raines
Andrew Orci

Jonathan Schurgin
Dane Cook
Mandy Adams Wolf

Cast

Brandon Routh
Theo Cooper

Caity Lotz
Emily McTier

Ben Feldman
Bug Kiesowski

Grant Bowler
Walter

Tom Cavanaugh
Zell

Dane Cook
Cole Dvorak

Astronauts Cooper, McTier, Kiesowski and Dvorak take part in a mission to test psychological resilience in deep-space conditions. They're left in a capsule underground for 400 days, during which time mission control will simulate various emergencies. Tensions arise among the crew, and they begin to see things, including a deformed man who breaks in through the airlock. When they go topside, they learn that the Earth's population has apparently been decimated by a major catastrophe. After violent encounters with cannibalistic survivors, Cooper and McTier return to the ship, unsure whether or not the catastrophe is real or part of the experiment.

Ghostbusters

USA/Australia 2016

Director: Paul Feig

Certificate 12A 116m 28s

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

The hilarious spectacle of online fanboys keeling over in shock at the thought of female ghostbusters is enough to earn this film the right to exist. It does mean, though, that it carries an unhealthy weight of expectation on its rather flimsy shoulders. Remaking a classic is always a fool's errand – why bother? – but when the original was a featherlight confection like *Ghostbusters*, it's all too easy for the new version to feel flatfooted in comparison. Paul Feig has done pretty well with his impossible task: his film is frothily watchable and should attract a large audience. And though it's frankly astonishing that Hollywood should need convincing, in 2016, that four funny women can carry a summer blockbuster, that's what Kristen Wiig, Melissa McCarthy, Kate McKinnon and Leslie Jones achieve with ease. But, but, but. The original was just so... charming. And this one isn't.

I don't think it's nostalgia. Ivan Reitman's 1984 film stands up well to this day, thanks partly to its good narrative bones, and partly to the alchemy of its casting. To be fair, the casting here is rock solid: the leads know exactly how to time a deadpan quip or riff on a comedy diatribe. Wiig plays the prim schoolmarm who has to learn to love chaos, while McCarthy is her overenthusiastic foil. It was an error to make Jones's character the sassy, streetwise one, since it looks very much like crass stereotyping, but Jones plays it to perfection and does get all the best lines. On the other hand, McKinnon's eccentric engineer is the highlight of the film and is genuinely the kind of female character you never normally see on screen, a genius in steampunk goggles who doesn't talk much but says it all with her swagger.

There's a sense, though, that everyone is trying a little too hard. Coco Chanel – and there's a nice girly reference for you, gentlemen – once supposedly said that you should always take off one piece of jewellery before leaving the house, and this film could have followed her advice by toning everything down a notch and aiming for the cool insouciance of Murray and Aykroyd (who both make cameo appearances to rub it in). More damagingly, while the dialogue is sharp, the pacing is sludgy: it seems to take



Some came gunning: *Ghostbusters*

forever for the women to set themselves up and start ghostbusting. When they do, the plot follows the usual ludicrous twists and turns as various slime-shooting spooks and Machiavellian politicians do battle with the plucky girls in boilersuits, leading to a final battle that's overlong and, for all its showy CGI, rather flat.

Perhaps the film's greatest weakness is that we never believe the women have a real stake in what they're doing. In 1984, the ghostbusters were ambitious: they wanted fame and fortune and they were prepared to get their hands dirty in the process. In 2016, they just want to be nice, and they're prepared to be mocked and disrespected in the process. Honestly, where's the fun in that? **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Ivan Reitman
Amy Pascal

Written by

Katie Dippold
Paul Feig

Based on the 1984 film *Ghostbusters*

written by Dan Aykroyd, Harold Ramis

Director of Photography

Robert Yeoman

Editors

Brent White
Melissa Bretherton

Production Designer

Jefferson Sage

Music

Theodore Shapiro

Supervising Sound Editors

Andrew DeCristofaro
Becky Sullivan

Costume Designer

Jeffrey Kurland

Special Visual Effects

Sony Pictures Imageworks
Visual Effects MPC
Iloura
Zero VFX

Furious FX

Legend FX

Instinctual

Stunt Co-ordinator

Walter Garcia

@Columbia Pictures

Industries, Inc., LSC

Film Corporation and

Village Roadshow

Films Global Inc.

Production Companies

Columbia Pictures

presents in

association with

Village Roadshow

Pictures an Ivan

Reitman production

Executive Producers

Paul Feig

Jessie Henderson

Dan Aykroyd

Tom Pollock

Joe Medjuck

Ali Bell

Michele Imperato

Stabile

Cast

Melissa McCarthy

Abby Yates

Kristen Wiig

Erin Gilbert

Leslie Jones

Patty Tolan

Kate McKinnon

Jillian Holtzmann

Charles Dance

Harold Filmore

Michael Kenneth Williams

Agent Hawkins

Chris Hemsworth

Kevin

Neil Casey

Rowan North

Cecily Strong

Jennifer Lynch

Matt Walsh

Agent Rorke

Ed Begley Jr

Ed Mulgrave

Bill Murray

Martin Heiss

Dan Aykroyd

cabbie

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

Some screenings

presented in 3D

Distributor

Sony Pictures

Releasing UK

Ice Age Collision Course

USA 2016

Director: Michael Thurmeier

Certificate U 94m 27s

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Still underrated, the original CG cartoon *Ice Age* (2002) told a small story of three talking animals protecting a human baby, with funny jokes and some impressive characterisation. (It was inspired by John Ford's 1948 western *3 Godfathers*.) In *Ice Age: Collision Course*, the fifth film in the series, the same animals must save Earth from a planet-killing meteor, accompanied by many more characters picked up in the sequels. But the jokes are mostly far less funny, and the crowd of characters often flattens into a dull clump of furry figures. The tiny scraps of story that the main heroes are given feel joyless, and the woolly mammoth Manfred becomes alarmingly nasty as he tries to stop his daughter growing up.

There are still bright patches, most obviously those with Scrat – the shrieking sabre-toothed squirrel and series mascot, who always follows his own madcap adventures. This time he's hurtled into outer space in a flying saucer (glimpsed in the first film), where he accidentally creates the solar system, gets spliced with his own beloved acorn and is steamrollered by artificial gravity. There's also a standout sequence involving a weasel voiced by Simon Pegg, who fights an aerial battle zooming up, down and inside a cliff, all the while singing a version of 'Figaro'. Indeed, Pegg's character is quite a bit more fun than he was in his last substantial appearance, in 2009's *Ice Age 3: Dawn of the Dinosaurs*.

Sadly, there are too few such moments to lift this cartoon. For all its disaster-film spectacle, *Ice Age: Collision Course* feels more like a TV special than a cinema competitor for *Zootropolis* or *Inside Out*. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Co-directed by

Galen Tan Chu

Produced by

Lori Forte

Screenplay

Michael Wilson

Michael Berg

Yoni Brenner

Story

Aubrey Solomon

Cinematographer

Renato Falcao

Edited by

James M. Palumbo

Art Director

Michael Knapp

Music

John Debnay

Sound Designers

Randy Thom

Jeremy Bowker

Supervising Animators

Jim Bresnahan

Melvin Tan

@Twentieth Century

Fox Film Corporation

Production Companies

Twentieth Century

Fox Animation

presents a Blue Sky

Studios production

Executive Producers

Chris Wedge

Carlos Saldanha

Voice Cast

Ray Romano

Manfred, 'Manny'

John Leguizamo

Sid

Denis Leary

Diego

Adam Devine

Julian

Jesse Tyler

Ferguson

Shangri Llama

Max Greenfield

Roger

Jessie J

Brooke

Nick Offerman

Gavin

Keke Palmer

Peaches

Josh Peck

Eddie

Simon Pegg

Buck/Pythagorus

Buck/Robo Buck

Seann William

Scott

Crash

Wanda Sykes

Granny

Jennifer Lopez

Shira

Queen Latifah

Ellie

Stephanie Beatriz

Gertie

Neil deGrasse

Tyson

Neil deBuck Weasel

Lilly Singh

Misty/Bubbles

Michael Strahan

Teddy

Dolby Atmos In Colour [2.35:1]

Some screenings

presented in 3D

Distributor

20th Century Fox

International (UK)

New York, present day. After a ghost terrifies a tour guide at an old mansion, the owners seek out Erin, a physicist who once co-wrote a book about the paranormal. Erin knows that her interest in ghosts could lead to her being fired from her university job, and is appalled to learn that her co-author and former friend Abby has republished the book. However, she agrees to visit the mansion with Abby and her new colleague, nuclear engineer Holtzmann. Their encounter with the mansion's ghost leads to a video that results in Erin losing her job. The three women decide to set up as ghostbusters, using technology invented by Holtzmann. They rent an old Chinese restaurant as their HQ, gain a handsome but stupid receptionist, Kevin, and meet Patty, who has also seen a ghost at the subway station where she works. With Patty on the team, they work together to catch their first ghost, which escapes and kills a renowned paranormal sceptic. After several more spectral encounters, they are desperate to convince the mayor that the city is in danger from the deranged Rowan North, who is using an electronic device to attract ghosts. Instead, the mayor brands them as publicity-seeking fakes. However, when North dies and returns as a powerful shape-shifting ghost intent on wreaking devastation, the four women do battle with him and defeat him. They are unable to take credit for their heroism, as the mayor wants to calm public panic, but are given unlimited funding to pursue their work.

When prehistoric Earth is threatened by a meteor, Manfred the mammoth, Sid the sloth and Diego the tiger must find a way to divert it, helped by mad genius weasel Buck.

The Idol

United Kingdom/United Arab Emirates/

The Netherlands/Israel/Qatar/Palestine/Canada 2015

Director: Hany Abu-Assad, Certificate PG 98m 48s

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Hany Abu-Assad is best known for his gritty depictions of the Israel-Palestine conflict in *Paradise Now* (2005) and *Omar* (2013). This latest film marks a change of direction, offering a feelgood rags-to-riches fairytale that uses its Gaza setting as a playground for old-school adventures rather than the backdrop to tragedy.

In telling the true story of Mohammed Assaf, the singing star who won hearts across the Middle East when he triumphed in the *Arab Idol* television show in 2013, Abu-Assad doesn't bother to combat the sentimentality; instead, he runs with it, focusing the first half of the film on the ten-year-old Assaf (Qais Atallah) and his cheeky, charming sister Nour (Hiba Atallah). There's more than a whiff of those cosy, mid-20th-century let's-put-on-a-show yarns here, as the two scamps struggle to acquire their instruments and set themselves up as musicians. This deliberate period feel is reinforced by the children's relationship with the war-damaged landscape, which unexpectedly recalls the sense of freedom and imaginative possibility offered by the bomb sites in Charles Crichton's *Hue and Cry* (1947).

The film opens with a brilliantly realised chase sequence in which Mohammed and Nour leap, duck and weave their way through chaotic streets and ruined buildings. Abu-Assad overcame considerable difficulties getting his crew into and out of Gaza safely, but these authentic locations are more than worth it, offering startling perspectives amid the twisted heaps of reinforced concrete. The young cast (including Ahmad Qassim and Abd-Elkarim Abu-Barakeh as the siblings' chums and bandmates Ashraf and Omar) were all recruited via casting sessions at local schools, and they put in impressive, confident performances, especially Hiba Atallah, who shines as Nour.

The raw energy of the youngsters is missed in the film's second half, which follows the adult Mohammed (Tawfeek Barhom) on his quest to reach the *Arab Idol* auditions in Cairo. Had it not been based on fact, the caked-on wish-fulfilment of his inevitable triumph would seem ridiculously over-the-top; Mohammed's passage to Egypt is eased by a series of improbable strokes of good fortune, and feels pat despite Abu-Assad's best attempts to build up tension. As a director and writer, Abu-Assad is less interested in the world outside Gaza, where Mohammed simply steps into the limelight and never leaves it. Wisely, the film powers through the lengthy *Arab Idol* process at speed, and



Cry freedom: Qais Attaallah, Heba Attaallah

keeps a close eye on the people following the show on television back home.

The real emotional heart of the film comes earlier, when Mohammed is forced to do a preliminary audition by Skype, with an underpowered internet connection turning his heartfelt performance into a series of glitchy glimpses brought to an end when the electricity generator bursts into flames. This is the perfect summation of the film's message: Mohammed's destiny has been shaped and constrained by the failed infrastructure that surrounds him in Gaza, but his talent still manages to fight its way out into the world, carried along by the power of hope. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Ali Jaafar
Amira Diab
Written by
Hany Abu-Assad
Sameh Zoabi
Director of Photography
Ehab Assal
Editor
Eyas Salman
Production Designer
Nael Kanj
Original Music Composer
Habib Shehadeh
Hanna
Sound Recording
Raja Dubayah
Costume Designer
Hamada Attallah

©Idol Film
Production Ltd, MBC
FZ LLC, KeyFilm,
September Film
Production Companies
Seville International
presents a Mezza
Terra Media
production
Co-produced
by O3, Majdal
Films, KeyFilm,
September Film
In association
with Doha Film

Institute, Fortress
Film Clinic, Rawabi,
Image Nation Abu
Dhabi, Cactus
World Films, Full
Moon Productions
Co-produced
by Enjaaz
Supported by
the Netherlands
Film Fund
Executive Producers
Hamed Mokhtar
Tiziana Sousou
Bashar Masri
Badr Jafar
Sassan Ahsani
Khalil Amiouni
Gisel Kordestani
Mufid Shawwa
Wafic Said
Khaled Said
Harold Van Lier
Anick Poirier

Cast

Qais Attaallah
young Mohammed
Assaf
Heba Attaallah
Nour
Ahmad Qassim
young Ahmad
Abdalkarim
Abubarak
young Omar
Teya Hussein

young Amal
Tawfeek Barhom
Mohammed Assaf
Dima Awawdeh
Amal
Ahmad Alrokh
Omar
Saber Shreim
Ahmad
Maisa Abd-Elhadi
Hiba
Amer Hlehel
Kamal
Manal Awad
mother of
Mohammed Assaf
Ashraf Barhoum
smuggler
Ali Suliman
Said
Nadine Labaki
Shadia

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

Gaza, 2005 and 2013. As children, Mohammed Assaf and his sister Nour have big dreams of forming a band and becoming international stars. Mohammed has an exceptional singing voice, while Nour is the driving force in the partnership. However, they live under siege in Gaza, and have few opportunities. Through determination and hard work, they eventually manage to buy second-hand instruments and set themselves up as a wedding band. When Nour is diagnosed with kidney failure and dies, Mohammed is ready to give up. Years later, his ambition is sparked again when he meets a girl who had once been Nour's friend. His music teacher and his old bandmate Ashraf both encourage him to enter a televised talent show via Skype. His audition is cut short by a power failure, but Mohammed is now determined to enter the biggest show in the region, 'Arab Idol', which is holding auditions in Cairo. With a fake passport and help from a friendly border guard, he makes it to Egypt and is given a ticket to enter the audition by a kindly stranger who is impressed with his singing. As he progresses through the competition, Mohammed suffers from the pressure of his growing fame, but he triumphs in the final. Celebrations erupt on the streets of Palestine. Mohammed becomes a singing sensation and a UN Goodwill Ambassador.

Ingrid Bergman In Her Own Words

Sweden/Germany/The Netherlands/Finland/Norway 2015

Director: Stig Björkman

Certificate PG 114m 2s



Shooting the breeze: Ingrid Bergman

See Feature
on page 28

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

With numerous excerpts from her private diaries, myriad family photographs and significant home-movie footage (much of it shot by the lady herself), this is very much an access-all-areas feature-length tribute to Ingrid Bergman. Past experience of TV arts docs has taught us that the opening up of an artist's family archive often comes at an editorial price, too often resulting in bland legacy management rather than genuine revisionist insight. All credit, then, to veteran Swedish critic and filmmaker Stig Björkman for surmounting the usual scissors-and-paste expectations and delivering an intimate, involving portrait of a remarkable woman who blazed her own independent path in love and on screen – a bio-doc with the complexity and texture of a drama to add to its fascinating mosaic of cherished memories and archive titbits.

The overall trajectory of Bergman's screen career is already well known. The fresh-faced Swede was one of the marquee names at home before being spotted by Hollywood, where she brought a new kind of unvarnished glamour to treasured favourites such as *Casablanca* (1942) and *Notorious* (1946). She then caused a scandal by taking up personally and professionally with Roberto Rossellini, when both were married to other people, though a subsequent rapprochement ensued, thanks to the Oscar-winning *Anastasia* (1956). As the years wore on, Bergman spent much time on stage in Europe and on Broadway, and had one last filmic flourish in Ingmar Bergman's *Autumn Sonata* (1978) – whose beady focus on motherhood could hardly be more relevant given what Björkman reveals here about her approach to parenting.

The bases, then, are duly covered, but what you don't get here (and which may not please everyone)

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Stina Gardell

Script

Stig Björkman
Stina Gardell
Dominika
Daubenbüchel

Music
Michael Nyman
Sound Design
Mario Adamsson

©Mantaray Film
Production Companies
Mantaray Film
presents a film by
Stig Björkman
Produced by
Mantaray Film in
co-production with
ZDF in collaboration
with Arte, Jonas
Gardell Produktion,

Director of Photography

Editor

Dominika
Daubenbüchel
Music
Michael Nyman
Sound Design
Mario Adamsson

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with Arte, Jonas
Gardell Produktion,

Spellbound Capital,
Filminvestering i
Örebro through
Filmregion
Stockholm-
Mälardalen, SVT,
Chimney, NTR, YLE
With support by
Swedish Film
Institute, Creative
Europe, Nordisk Film
& TV Fond, Swedish
Arts Grant Committee
Sponsored by
Swedish Film Institute
Film Extracts
På Solsidan (1936)
Sunnyside (1936)
Casablanca (1942)
Notorious (1946)
Europa '51 (1952)

Elena et les Hommes/
Elena and Her
Men (1956)
Spellbound (1945)
Herbstsonate/
Autumn Sonata
(1978)
Landskamp (1932)
Munkbrogreven/
Count of the Monks
Bridge (1935)
Die vier Gesellen
(1938)
Dr. Jekyll and Mr.
Hyde (1941)
Roma città aperta/
Rome Open
City (1945)
Stromboli, terra di
Dio/Stromboli (1950)
Viaggio in Italia/

Journey to
Italy (1954)
Aimez-vous
Brahms?/Goodbye
Again (1961)
Indiscret (1958)
Cactus Flower (1969)
Bakomfilm
Höstsonaten (1978)

With

Pia Lindström
Roberto Rossellini
Ingrid Rossellini
Isabella Rossellini
Fiorella Mariani
Liv Ullmann
Sigourney Weaver
Jeanine Basinger
participants

Ingrid Bergman's
voice
Alicia Vikander

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Swedish
theatrical title
Jag är Ingrid

This biographical portrait of actress Ingrid Bergman draws on decades' worth of home-movie footage and family photographs, readings from her private journals and clips spanning her filmography, plus newsreel coverage and TV chat-show appearances. It presents a woman who was formed by the early loss of her parents, then driven by professional ambition and curiosity as her career took her from Sweden to Hollywood and Italy, with subsequent transatlantic engagements on stage and in film. This was matched by a restless search

for personal happiness, which saw her marry three times and often placed a strain on her relationship with her children – Pia Lindström and the Rossellini siblings Isabella, Ingrid and Roberto – all of whom participate in the film, expressing admiration for their mother but recalling that they never saw enough of her.

Bergman died in 1982, aged 67. Her collection of home movies, photographs and journals was donated to Wesleyan University, offering a unique insight into her life and times.

Jim The James Foley Story

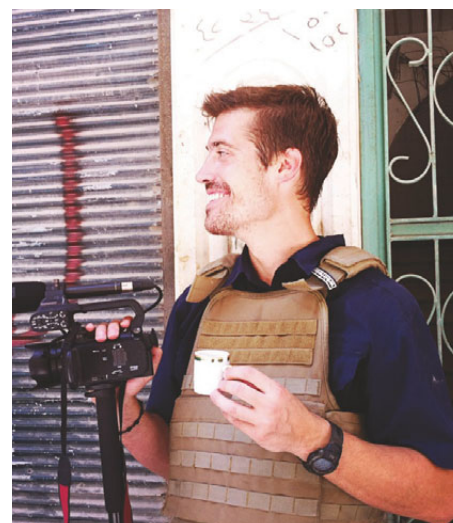
USA 2016
Director: Brian Oakes

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

James Foley, according to his friend and fellow conflict reporter Clare Morgana Gillis, “would have been horrified” by the outpouring of public emotion that followed his murder in 2014 by the emergent Isis. Foley was in Syria, Gillis goes on, “to talk about the Syrian people” – not to court glory or martyrdom for himself.

It might thereby follow that Foley would have been troubled by a documentary enumerating his virtues, and more so by one that shrouds his death in gravitas and mystique while using footage of numerous nameless Syrian corpses to illustrate its context. It’s an unsettling trap for a film focused on Foley that it inevitably risks reinforcing both the symbolic potency that made him such a high-value target – his apparent on-camera beheading was a media event, disseminated worldwide via the internet – and the troubling partiality whereby some human lives are collectively deemed a more tragic loss than others. But if simply eulogising Foley is clearly part of this film’s project, so too is a probe into the mindset that drove him to undertake such high risk for such scant reward; a meditation on the shift in media conditions that has led to conflict reporting being dominated by daredevil and barely protected freelancers such as Foley; and an exploration of the experience of captivity.

Three distinct constituencies comment on Foley here – his family, who negotiated with Isis for his release; reporters and photojournalists who worked with him in Libyan and Syrian war zones; and fellow prisoners who were held with him in Syria. On Foley’s specialness, all are agreed – his good looks come up as often as his energy and generosity, as if the archetype of the handsome hero assists people in attempting to make sense of his story. However, the extremely different contexts in which they knew him create a fragmented, shifting portrait of a beloved but strangely centreless character. The avoidance of any discussion of Foley’s emotional life and the absence of detail about his political convictions adds to the sense of someone on to whom meaning is readily projected but whose essential self remains enigmatic. (The



Conflict zone: James Foley

question debated in the US media of whether Foley was a convert to Islam is indirectly approached via an archive interview in which he describes adopting the schedule of Muslim prisoners for his own Catholic prayers.)

For Foley’s family, the point of what he was doing – the cause for which he sacrificed security, material comforts and ultimately his life – evidently remains elusive. His fellow reporters acknowledge the contrasting impulses that drive them: the urge to speak on behalf of the dispossessed, but also the pursuit of thrills. Gillis talks about the “deep absurdity” she registers on returning from a war zone to the bounty of America – “How do we make our money? What is the basis of our peace, our economic viability...?” Meanwhile photographer Zac Baillie notes the complication that “you start missing all the bombs and the fighting. It’s really kind of sick.”

When moral absolutes are impossibly elusive, extreme danger provides a sort of certainty. And so does war: the prisoners held with Foley describe how they created their own game of Risk, and played out their own version of the struggles for territory of which they were a living part. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Eva Lipman
George Kunhardt
Teddy Kunhardt
Written by
Chris Chuang
with
Heather MacDonald
Brian Oakes
Director of Photography
Clair Popkin
Edited by
Aleks Gezentsvey
Production Designer
Alina Smirnova
Music
Dan Romer
Saul Simon
MacWilliams
Osei Essed
Sound
Chris Chuang
Denzil Xavier
Wardrobe
Meghan Campbell

©Kunhardt Films
Production Companies
Kunhardt Films
presents with
Marigold Pictures
in association with
HBO Documentary
Films
Executive Producer
Peter Kunhardt

Cast
Ben Chase
Jim Foley
Jonathon Lyons
John Cantlie
Magnus Tønning
Riise
Daniel Rye Ottosen
Eric S. Robertson
Nicolas Henin

In Colour
[L&S:1]

Distributor
Dogwoof

This documentary about American freelance conflict reporter James Foley, who was murdered by the Islamic State group in 2014, is recounted via archive footage and interviews with Foley’s family and friends and those with whom he was held captive. Foley begins conflict reporting in Iraq in 2011, and goes on to report from Libya, embedding with rebel fighters. In an attack that kills his photojournalist friend Anton Hammerl, Foley is captured by forces loyal to Colonel Gaddafi and held for 44 days. After his release, Foley returns to the US, where he takes an office job as an editor, but he soon leaves again to cover the anti-Assad uprising in Syria. He is kidnapped in November 2012 and held with 17 other hostages. His family is contacted by a group demanding a ransom of \$100m or the release of Muslim prisoners held by the US; negotiations are protracted and unsuccessful. European hostages held with Foley are released; Danish journalist Daniel Rye Ottosen delivers a memorised message to his family. The following month, Isis releases a video online in which Foley recites a statement on its behalf blaming America for his death; he is then apparently beheaded.

is much in the way of fresh gossip or fun facts about her best-known movies. Not terribly much at all, in the event, about *Casablanca*, *Notorious* or even 1954’s *Voyage to Italy* (which has always looked like scenes from the Rossellini marriage, and some confirmation might have been welcome). Overall, though, it’s hard to feel short-changed, since Björkman’s ambitions are not about looking in from the outside but rather about trying to assess how Bergman thought of herself, as revealed in her diaries and correspondence – read with a sense of hushed confidences by Alicia Vikander.

What emerges is that some of the defining events of Bergman’s life happened before she ever ventured on to a film set. Björkman grabs our attention early on with a heartbreaking diary entry from the 13-year-old Ingrid, offering a desperate plea for God to intervene in her father’s illness. Alas, he passed away shortly afterwards, in 1928, 11 years after her mother had succumbed to jaundice, leaving Ingrid with no memory of her. In the time that remained to her dad, he took numerous photographs and home movies of his only child, instilling in her the significance of recording family life. Moving forward, we see how much time Bergman spent filming and photographing her own children and husbands. Here, however, Björkman’s film points up a fundamental contradiction: for all her determination not to let these domestic moments slip away, we sense an inherent restlessness. Professional insecurity made Bergman nervous about being out of work, and she was utterly dedicated when in it, a fact that often limited the time she spent with her kids – as valuable interviews with Pia Lindström and Isabella, Ingrid and Roberto (junior) Rossellini attest.

Intriguingly, Bergman’s diaries talk about a lonely childhood, when the acting bug was sown by the conversations she had with her imaginary friends. This sense of self-communion or self-involvement certainly comes through in the often headstrong personal decisions that shaped her life and career. Björkman is relatively sparing with actual movie clips, but anyone who’s watched Bergman’s films over the years will be familiar with the sense that she’s captivating on screen not just for that open-air beauty and confidence within her own stately frame, but precisely because she’s so much her own woman – innocent yet carnal, troubled yet with a self-preserving intelligence. As such, she’s actually quite hard to read, and we’re drawn to her even more because of it.

With so much reference material at his disposal, Björkman can’t pierce that mystery entirely, but what he does do quite elegantly is explore the mixed feelings of those four surviving children, all of whom make clear how much fun she was to be with and yet – without any sense of *Mommie Dearest* recrimination – also give vent to their feelings of being left behind when she was away filming, or indeed when she had moved cities to be with a new partner. Michael Nyman’s chamber-scaled score, in part a reworking of his affecting soundtrack for 1999’s *Wonderland*, provides a tellingly poignant undertow to the family’s to-and-fro of enduring affection and unrequited longing, all of which adds considerably to our understanding of one of the screen’s indelible icons. **S**

Julieta

Director: Pedro Almodóvar
Certificate 15 98m 48s

See Feature
on page 38

Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

One of the enduring pleasures of Pedro Almodóvar's cinema is his mastery of narrative complexity: his films often seem to be generated by a set of completely disparate events and ideas from which he constructs narratives that are coherent but nevertheless tend to burst at the seams with their own sometimes narrowly contained dissonances and incongruities. *Julieta* is entirely characteristic of Almodóvar in the sheer density of elements, both narrative and symbolic, that it comprises: among them, the geographic diversity of the settings; a heroine, Julieta, played at different ages by two actresses; the chain of Julieta's different homes; and symbolic ingredients that include a stag glimpsed at night from a train window, a lecture on Greek mythology and the statuettes of seated men with truncated limbs made by Julieta's sculptor friend Ava.

The miracle of *Julieta* is that it feels as loose and multiple as the above suggests, yet at the same time very tight and unified. Among the film's themes are the complexity and seeming diffuseness of a person's life, and the hidden patterns created by the interaction of contingency and memory; as an academic specialising in Greek myth, Julieta is a highly qualified reader of the 'novel' of her existence.

The film is Almodóvar's third literary adaptation, following the Ruth Rendell-inspired *Live Flesh* (1997) and *The Skin I Live In* (2011), based on Thierry Jonquet's *Tarantula*. This time, however, the source is not a novel but three consecutive short stories from Alice Munro's 2004 collection *Runaway*. Although each Munro story stands alone and covers a separate episode and theme, cross-references make it clear that they can all be read as concerning the same woman, Juliet, at different periods. Munro's three stories effectively provide all the material that Almodóvar dramatises here.

Where the director has scope to make his film properly Almodóvarian is partly in knitting Munro's three vignettes into a single narrative of characteristic intricacy; and partly in imposing his unmistakable stylistic signature, with all the signals of Spanishness that entails. Originally planned as his first English-language film, *Julieta* has been transplanted from the original Canadian settings to Madrid, Galicia, the Pyrenees and elsewhere. The film is steeped in overtly foregrounded style, right from the image seen in the opening credits: draped red fabric that pulses like a human heart but turns out to be Julieta's dress. Throughout, the expressionistic exuberance that we associate with the Almodóvar look is rooted firmly in a realistic everyday context by Antxón Gómez's production design and Sonia Grande's costumes: we are constantly shown the autonomous expressive power of, say, a certain wallpaper pattern, shelves of Galician pottery, the retro dress worn by Julieta's elderly mother. There is also the Klimt-style dressing gown that Julieta wears in one of her solitary moments, its vividness strikingly clashing with her melancholy, and perhaps itself helping to save her from outright despair.

This tantalisingly open-ended film is Almodóvar's most sombre to date: it is to his last feature, 2013's airline farce *I'm So Excited!*,



All about my mother: Inma Cuesta, Adriana Ugarte

as *Interiors* (1978) was to Woody Allen's *Bananas* (1971). *Julieta* is overtly serious in its concern with loss and the mature retrospective contemplation of life's complexity, its visual energy contrasting strongly with its emotional severity and the almost total absence of either comedy or manifest narrative playfulness (the only echo of the famed Almodóvar 'camp' is a glimpse of one character's fashionista friends). Where he is often associated with melodrama, in *Julieta* Almodóvar has professed to be creating 'pure drama', free of excess or fancy: hence the part played by classical mythology, which young Julieta teaches, and which reinforces the transcendental resonances of her own experiences.

Above all, *Julieta* is a study in duality. It involves, for example, two young women both guilt-stricken at their presumed responsibility for a death (a train suicide in Julieta's case; in the case of her daughter Antía, the drowning of her father) and two relationships involving another woman in the frame (Ava's double is the young north African mistress of Julieta's father). The doubling begins with the fact that the heroine is played by two different actresses. The young Julieta, a vital, intellectually energetic woman open to all that life can offer her, is played by

Adriana Ugarte and visually presented in a heightened manner. She's first seen in bright-blue stockings and leather miniskirt, with a shock of blonde hair, as if she's stepped out of a mid-80s Almodóvar comedy – or as if she were the older Julieta's stylised version of her remembered self.

The *Julieta* of the framing narrative is played with a deeply poignant careworn dignity by Emma Suárez, whom UK audiences may remember as an angelic ingénue in such Julio Medem films as *Tierra* (1996). Twenty years on, she's a perfect fit for a 'haunted mature woman' role that might previously have been played by Marisa Paredes. Almodóvar cleverly, but in no way callously, makes capital of the fact that Suárez is visibly older than some viewers may remember her – notably in the extraordinary *coup de cinéma* in which Julieta (Ugarte), bathed by her daughter, emerges from under a towel several years later as her older self (Suárez), her face visibly marked by life's cares. In the version of this scene depicted on the film's poster, the protective, caring Antía (never seen in the film as a grown woman) is replaced by the young Julieta as played by Ugarte, highlighting the lesson of *Julieta*'s interweaving of doubling, maternity and memory: to wit, that the child is mother to the woman. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Agustín Almodóvar
Esther García
Screenplay
Pedro Almodóvar
Based on the stories *Destination*, *Soon and Silence* by Alice Munro
Director of Photography
Jean Claude Larrieu
Editor

José Salcedo
Art Director
Antxon Gómez
Music
Alberto Iglesias
Sound Recordist
Sergio Bürmann
Costume Designer
Sonia Grande
Production Companies
El Deseo presents

A film by Almodóvar
In association with FilmNation Entertainment, Echo Lake Entertainment, Blue Lake Media Fund
With the support of ICAA
With the financing of ICO
With the participation of TVE, Movistar+, El Deseo

Cast
Emma Suárez
Julieta
Adriana Ugarte
young Julieta
Daniel Grao
Xoan
Inma Cuesta
Ava
Dario Grandinetti
Lorenzo
Michelle Jenner
Beatriz, 'Bea'

Pilar Castro
Claudia
Nathalie Poza
Juana
Susí Sánchez
Sara
Joaquín Notario
Samuel
Priscilla Delgado
Blanca Parés
Ariadna Martín
Antía, Julieta's daughter

Rossy de Palma
Marían

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributors
Pathé Productions Ltd
20th Century Fox
International (UK)

Madrid, present day. Julieta, a middle-aged woman, is about to move to Portugal with boyfriend Lorenzo but meets Beatriz, a friend of her long-lost daughter Antía. Julieta decides to stay in Madrid, moving back to the apartment block where she and Antía once lived. Julieta remembers her past.

In the 80s, as a young classics teacher, she meets fisherman Xoan on a train and sleeps with him, following another man's suicide. She moves in with Xoan in Galicia, where Antía is born. Years later,

Julieta realises that Xoan has continued sleeping with their sculptor friend Ava; Antía, now 13, is away at camp when Xoan is killed in a storm. Julieta moves with Antía to Madrid. Four years later, Antía attends a spiritual retreat, leaving without telling Julieta and breaking off communication with her. Ava tells Julieta that Antía blamed the two women for Xoan's death. Antía writes from Switzerland to tell Julieta that her son has died. Julieta drives with Lorenzo towards a possible reconciliation with her daughter.

The Killing\$ of Tony Blair

United Kingdom 2016
Directors: Sanne van den Bergh, Daniel Turi, Greg Ward
Certificate 15 94m 32s

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

It would be easy to dismiss a documentary about Tony Blair presented by maverick former Labour/Respect MP George Galloway sight unseen – surely it's just going to be a hatchet job on one charismatic demagogue by another? But while there's clearly no love lost between frontman and subject (a considerable understatement), an impressive range of contributors allows for a more nuanced analysis than Galloway might have been inclined to present on his own. Politician David Davis and journalist Peter Osborne denounce what they see as Blair's essential immorality, Stephen Fry and Blair's sister-in-law Lauren Booth own up to being initially star-struck, Clare Short (Blair's international development secretary) and Craig Murray (Blair's ambassador to Uzbekistan) offer insider accounts, while writer-activists Will Self and Noam Chomsky analyse the wider political picture.

The film is briskly edited and very watchable, but it ultimately falls well short of the promise made by the initial crowdfunding pitch. Far from being packed with "startling new truths", the film offers little that will surprise long-term Blair-watchers (of any persuasion), and the thesis that Blair's personal ambition did the Labour Party possibly irreparable damage is hardly a controversial minority opinion: indeed, it's repeated daily as a by-product of the party's ongoing internal ructions. **C**



Blair rage: George Galloway

Credits and Synopsis

Producers George Galloway Daniel Turi Putri Gayatri Pertiwi Sanne van den Bergh	Steve Finnerly Juo Tueros Additional Sound Will Davies	Michael L.B. Cowan Francis Fitzgerald Ronald Hughes Derek McMinn Dylan White
Script George Galloway Daniel Turi	@Molucca Media Ltd	
Director of Photography Greg Ward	Executive Producers George Galloway Putri Gayatri Pertiwi	In Colour [L78:1] Part-subtitled
Editor McDonald Brown	Max Keiser Abby Martin	Distributor Bulldog Film Distribution
Original Music	Nima Amin	

A documentary in which former MP George Galloway investigates three alleged 'killings' by former British prime minister Tony Blair: he argues that Blair killed the Labour Party in the pursuit of personal ambition, that he killed thousands in Iraq as a misguided international adventure born more from messianic self-belief than supporting evidence, and that he has subsequently made a killing in the financial sense, many of these deals necessitating the turning of a blind eye to the activities of some of the world's more repressive regimes. Galloway also explores Blair's life and career, often in quest of early indications of subsequent high-profile decisions.

The Legend of Tarzan

USA/Australia/United Kingdom 2016
Director: David Yates
Certificate 12A 109m 48s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Edgar Rice Burroughs's archetypal jungle action hero – an orphaned English lord raised by ape-like creatures – first appeared in the 1912 magazine serial *Tarzan of the Apes*. Since Elmo Lincoln played him in *Tarzan of the Apes* in 1918, there has almost always been an active film or television Tarzan franchise, sometimes several in competition. For generations, the longest shadow was cast by Olympic swimmer Johnny Weissmuller, who played the jungle hero in 12 films, starting with *Tarzan the Ape Man* in 1932 – Weissmuller's distinctive yodel-yell is echoed by the sound effect used here – though contemporary audiences are most likely to remember the tree-surfing hero of Disney's cartoon *Tarzan* (1999). There have been serious reboots, such as Hugh Hudson's *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes* (1984), and trivial ones, like John Derek's *Tarzan the Ape Man* (1981).

Now David Yates – who signed the last few Harry Potter films – relaunches the character as a sort of superhero, with Spider-Man-like physical abilities (unusual tree-gripping hands), a not-so-secret identity and enough traumatic losses of actual and surrogate parents to spur explanatory flashbacks. *The Legend of Tarzan* gets one of the trickiest things about the character right by casting muscular yet sensitive Alexander Skarsgård in the role. In a reversal of expectations, we first see the jungle lord immaculately dressed, sipping tea (with his little finger out) with the prime minister (Jim Broadbent as Gladstone) in Downing Street, before the camera gets close enough to show the many scars that betoken past adventures. His familiar origin story is salted through in flashbacks, but the film positions itself as a

launch for a new franchise. This Tarzan and Jane return to Africa after a literally barren spell in England (she's had a miscarriage) and reconnect with the essentials of their characters in both derring-do and primitive domesticity (only in the Congo do they have a child – giving Warner Bros. an option to go with *Son of Tarzan* next).

With Tarantino refugees Samuel L. Jackson and Christoph Waltz cast as opposite sides of a debate about historical colonial atrocities in the Congo, and some nuance given to Djimon Hounsou's leopardskin-clad African nemesis, the film tries to escape the more problematic elements inherent in Burroughs's fantasy of a white savage aristocrat as the saviour of a dark continent and its peoples. Similarly, Margot Robbie's spirited Jane gets her own action sequence to take the edge off the fact that she's yet another heroine who serves as a hostage for most of the film and gets ignored in the finale.

Where the film fumbles is in what ought to be a slam dunk: Tarzan in action. The troubled *The Lone Ranger* (2013) came to life in its chase and fight scenes, glorying in serial-style heroism, but *The Legend of Tarzan* overdoses on CGI-augmented stuntwork and suffers from an excess of bloodless, incoherent battles. We get staples of the Tarzan movie – swinging through trees, fights with well-matched gorilla or human enemies (Waltz's villain has a trick rosary garrotte that Tarzan breaks by flexing his neck muscles), stampedes and pitched battles. Somehow, none of this surefire business plays as well as it should – it lacks the kinetic joy in open-air action that Weissmuller (and the Disney toon) expressed, and it's not introspective enough to match Christopher Lambert's ape-out-of-the-jungle melancholy in *Greystoke*. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Jerry Weintraub David Barron Alan Riche Tony Ludwig Screenplay Adam Cozad Craig Brewer Story Craig Brewer Adam Cozad Based on the 'Tarzan' stories created by Edgar Rice Burroughs Director of Photography Henry Braham Edited by Mark Day Production Designer Stuart Craig MUSIC Rupert Gregson-Williams	Sound Designer Glenn Freemantle Costume Designer Ruth Myers Visual Effects Framestore MPC Rising Sun Pictures Rodeo FX Method Studios Lola Visual Effects One of Us Stunt Co-ordinator Buster Reeves	Entertainment LLC (U.S., Canada, Bahamas & Bermuda) ©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., Village Roadshow Films (BV) Limited and RatPac-Dune Entertainment LLC (all other territories) Production Companies A Warner Bros. Pictures presentation in association with Village Roadshow Pictures, RatPac-Dune Entertainment A Jerry Weintraub, Riche/Ludwig, Beaglepug production A David Yates film Executive Producers Susan Ekins
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Nikolas Korda
Keith Goldberg
Steven Mnuchin
David Yates
Mike Richardson
Bruce Berman

Cast

Alexander Skarsgård
John Clayton, 'Tarzan'
Samuel L. Jackson
George Washington Williams
Margot Robbie
Jane Clayton
Djimon Hounsou
Chief Mbonga
Jim Broadbent
Prime Minister
Christoph Waltz
Leon Rom
Rory J. Saper
young Tarzan, 18 years

Christian Stevens
young Tarzan, 5 years
Sidney Raitsoe
Wasimbu
Osy Ikhile
Kwete
Mens-Sana Tamakloe
Kolo
Antony Acheampong
Kanam
Edward Apeagyei
Kimanga
Ashley Byam
Kasai
Casper Crump
Major Kerkhover

Dolby Atmos
Colour and Prints by
Technicolor
[2.35:1]

Some screenings

presented in 3D

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

Opar, a region of the Congo, the 1880s. Belgian envoy Leon Rom strikes a deal with tribal chief Mbonga. Rom promises to deliver the chief's enemy John Clayton (aka Tarzan) in exchange for diamonds needed to hire a mercenary army to subdue the territory for the bankrupt Belgian king. Rom arranges for Tarzan, who has been living in England with his wife Jane after being raised by apes in Africa, to be invited to tour the country. Tarzan is reluctant to accept the invitation, but is persuaded to do so by the American George Washington Williams, who is worried about abuses of colonial power in the Congo.

Rom tries to capture Tarzan but is satisfied to take Jane – knowing that Tarzan will track her to Opar. Tarzan returns to the jungle and reconnects with his animal allies. He defeats Mbonga in battle, though he apologises for the offence that caused the chief's enmity – killing his son after the boy slew Tarzan's ape foster mother. Williams persuades Mbonga to join Tarzan in an attack on Rom's forces. Tarzan throws away the diamonds of Opar before the mercenaries can be hired, and summons crocodiles to eat Rom.

A year later, Tarzan and Jane are living in Africa and have a son.

Lights Out

USA 2016
Director: David F. Sandberg
Certificate 15 80m 49s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Lights Out doesn't bring much that's new to the medium-to-low-budget horror sweepstakes, save for the novelty of its premise – a spook who's swift, unstoppable and deadly in the dark but evaporates the moment you hit the light switch. However, to the credit of screenwriter Eric Heisserer and Swedish-born director David F. Sandberg, who is adapting his own 2013 short film, they don't stretch out that premise any further than it can stand to be stretched without starting to droop. In what adds up to a little over 80 minutes of onscreen action, they run through just about every single scenario possible involving the use of light for self-defence: an introduction that uses motion-detector lights in a warehouse to good effect, a well-constructed if slightly silly set piece using the flashing neon sign of a tattoo parlour, and bits of business with a cellphone screen, the keychain-activated headlamps of a parked car, a wind-up torch, a wand-shaped blacklight and a vulnerable candle flame that must be zealously guarded against the threat of being extinguished.

The spaces between scares have been filled in with by-the-book scenes of family drama and commitment-phobic romance between protagonist Rebecca (Teresa Palmer) and her puppyish not-quite-boyfriend Bret (Alexander DiPersia, who looks like a Bret), both introduced in post-coital chit-chat at her downtown apartment, which is decorated like an exploded Hot Topic store, splattered with Neil Gaiman hardcovers and Avenge Sevenfold posters. Once Rebecca starts trying to get a grip on what exactly it is that's keeping her little brother (Gabriel Bateman) from sleeping at night, we are provided with storage boxes full of exposition explaining the origins of the black-silhouetted critter with the fluttering Max Schreck finger-extensions who lurks in the shadows of the gloomy California Tudor owned by their mother Sophie (Maria Bello).

That something is 'Diana', an old acquaintance from Sophie's asylum-bound girlhood, who kept hanging around even after dying in an



Cry in the dark: Gabriel Bateman, Teresa Palmer

experimental treatment, hosted in mom's brain and empowered whenever Sophie slips her meds. (In essence, Sandberg has fused Wes Craven's *Nightmare on Elm Street* to his *Shocker*.) The circumstances through which Diana came to exist in her supernatural form are spelled out at some length, this extending to a flashback full of corny 'vintage' which perpetuates the myth that no one in America knew how to focus a camera before the Reagan administration. Such elaboration shows an undervaluation of the power of mystery – the movie's most genuinely hair-raising scene simply involves Sophie standing alone in her bedroom at night, addressing someone or something in the pitch black beyond the threshold of a doorframe – and also gives the idle viewer time to think about the many loopholes to the 'rules' governing Diana's power.

Narrative logic aside, there are a few legitimate jump scares here, and while ultimately the filmmakers are too full of the milk of crowdpleasing kindness to bump off anyone the audience could conceivably care about, introducing some fall-guy cops at the 11th hour to nudge up the body count, they do wring every last drop out of their concept. None of which, of course, will prevent a curtain call for dirty Diana if the box-office numbers are there. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
James Wan
Lawrence Grey
Eric Heisserer
Screenplay
Eric Heisserer
Based on the short film by David F. Sandberg
Director of Photography
Marc Spicer
Edited by
Kirk Morri
Michel Aller
Production Designer
Jennifer Spence
Music
Benjamin Wallfisch
Sound Mixer
Robert Janiger
Costumes
Designed by
Kristin M. Burke

©Warner Bros.
Entertainment Inc.
and RatPac-Dune

Entertainment LLC
Production Companies
A New Line Cinema presentation in association with RatPac-Dune Entertainment
A Grey Matter, Atomic Monster production
Executive Producers
Walter Hamada
Dave Neustadter

Richard Brener
Steven Mnuchin
Michael Clear
Jack Murray
Ben Everard

Cast
Teresa Palmer
Rebecca
Gabriel Bateman
Martin
Alexander DiPersia
Bret

Billy Burke
Paul
Maria Bello
Sophie
Alicia Vela-Bailey
Diana
Andi Osho
Emma
Rolando Boyce
Officer Brian Andrews
Maria Russell
Officer Gomez

Dolby Digital
In Colour

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures
International (UK)

California, present day. Paul, working late one night in his warehouse, is attacked by a creature that is only corporeal and dangerous in the dark. After Paul's death, his young son Martin is left with his mentally unstable mother Sophie, who has been communicating with an unseen, malevolent presence since coming off her medication. When Martin keeps falling asleep at school following sleepless nights at home, his older half-sister Rebecca decides to bring him to her apartment, where she is suddenly disturbed by the same spectral presence that was responsible for Paul's death. She connects this to memories of a female spectre that persecuted her during her childhood, which identified itself as 'Diana'. Visiting her mother with her boyfriend Bret, Rebecca discovers that Diana is connected to a childhood friend of her mother's: a young woman with a rare condition that made her vulnerable to light, who died during an experimental treatment. Rebecca and Bret stay at Sophie's house to protect Martin. Diana causes a power cut in the night and attacks her perceived enemies. Realising that Diana is a parasite living in her own mind, Sophie puts a bullet through her brain, lifting the curse.

Mike and Dave Need Wedding Dates

USA 2016, Director: Jake Szymanski
Certificate 15 98m 25s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Mike and Dave Need Wedding Dates charts a collision course between two matched pairs of co-dependent, substance-abusing monsters of privilege: the man-boy brothers of the title, played by Adam Devine and Zac Efron, and the dates they bring along to their sister's wedding in Hawaii, best-friends-since-girlhood Tatiana (Aubrey Plaza) and Alice (Anna Kendrick). The rapport of both same-sex duos moves along on well-worn paths of egged-on, mutually reinforced self-destruction. It's a game that is a race to the bottom, they realise come the last act – though not before a final burst of gleeful destruction.

The phrase 'race to the bottom' also handily describes the trajectory of the US screen comedy since the raunch renaissance at the turn of the last millennium, with studios engaging in a game of limbo to see who can gross-out and out-gross one another, to the point where multiplex options today make up a veritable cinema of transgression. Efron, who first emerged as a triple-threat 21st-century Troy Donahue, has lately been making most of his walking-around money at this sort of thing: *Mike and Dave* rounds out a trio of 2016 low-comedy outings with *Dirty Grandpa* (a film of desperate death-driven pathos, also featuring Plaza) and *Neighbours 2: Sorority Rising*. The latter was scripted by *Mike and Dave* co-screenwriters Andrew Jay Cohen and Brendan O'Brien – though if the closing-credits blooper reel is to be taken at face value, there was a helluva lot of riffing going on during the shoot.

Everything about the movie is lazy, from the blandly descriptive title to the generic soundtrack cues to the ultimate turnabout discovery of ethics and conscience, dispatched with as little conviction as possible. The film is the first theatrical feature by Jake Szymanski, and has most of the flaws we've come to take for granted in contemporary junk comedies: badly matched cutting and dialogue out of sync with lips, low-res stock establishing shots, indifferent (widescreen!) framing, nonsensical characterisation, overreliance on pop-culture namecheck laugh lines guaranteed to travel poorly, and so forth.

The 'Szymanski Touch', inasmuch as one can be detected, is more of a chokehold – and when



Brothers grim: Adam Devine, Zac Efron

Nerve

USA/Hong Kong 2016
Directors: Henry Joost, Ariel Schulman
Certificate 15 96m 9s

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

There can't be many contemporary filmmakers better suited to interpreting Jeanne Ryan's young adult novel *Nerve* than Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman. The pair declared their interest in internet technology with *Catfish* (2010), the debut documentary that dared to explore the dark recesses of Facebook and asked if well-meant self-reinvention can ever be without its victims.

Released within weeks of the launch of *Pokémon Go* – which, like the online game of dare played by the characters here, uses GPS – *Nerve* is set in 2020 but doesn't need to be. Co-opting the technology of apps such as the Twitter-owned Periscope, a video-streaming platform that enables users to transmit a live recording to their followers, the game Ryan imagines could conceivably be available to download tomorrow, and become the cause of similar sorts of vice and violence.

Dividing the game's subscribers into Watchers and Players, *Nerve* enacts a citywide tournament to crown the bravest Player. Watchers, forming an anonymous (and ominous) online community, challenge the game's Players to complete dares. These range from the awkward and the gross to the life-threatening – for example, lying down under a passing train. Fail or bail, and a Player is eliminated.

It's as crucial to *Nerve*'s aesthetic as to the game itself that the Players record themselves performing the voted-for task on their smartphone cameras. Frequently, the film screen becomes a phone display, complete with icons denoting, for instance, a Player's climbing watch-count. Occasionally, we look out of the hardware-insides of a phone, catching its owner's reaction on reading a new dare, a look of shock or exhilaration registering on their face.

These techniques are as effective as the concept is convincing. The switching between camera angles lends the film a kineticism that's second nature to a generation who routinely juggle devices. Furthermore, the film shows a



Bet your life: Dave Franco, Emma Roberts

natural understanding of how different types and uses of technology affect dramatic tension. When the film's romantic leads Vee and Ian are dared to reach 60mph on a motorbike, with Ian piloting blindfolded, the livestream of their hair-raising ride along a Manhattan highway is beamed on to a big screen at a house party. There are many more ways in which the directors integrate this invented game into the world as we know it, merging it with the familiar. Low-res YouTube footage of reckless stunts gone wrong makes its way into a montage of 'fails', while the slo-mo homecoming of the 'insta-famous' Vee and Ian evokes a Taylor Swift music video.

These strengths, however, are watered down by lukewarm chemistry between the leads, Emma Roberts and Dave Franco, and an ending that's full of holes. What's worse, the time and effort put into designing the game (with great results) seems to have been deducted from development of character: Vee's free-spirited friend Sydney going braless in an early scene and a daredevil brother not long in the grave (goading Vee to live bolder) are two of the more dismaying cases of shorthand deployed in place of proper, scripted characterisation. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Jonathan Levine Peter Chernin Jenno Topping	association with TSG Entertainment a Chernin Entertainment production	Randy Kumail Nanjiani Keanu Bob Turton Bob/Lauralie Alice Wetterlund Cousin Terry
Written by Andrew Jay Cohen Brendan O'Brien Inspired by the life stories of Mike Stangle, Dave Stangle	Executive Producers David Ready Andrew Jay Cohen Brendan O'Brien Nan Morales	Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]
Director of Photography Matthew Clark	Cast Zac Efron Dave Stangle Anna Kendrick Alice Adam Devine Mike Stangle Aubrey Plaza Tatiana Stephen Root Burt Stangle Sam Richardson Eric Sugar Lyn Beard Jeanie Stangle Eugene Cordero Kai, hotel manager Lavell Crawford Keith Stephanie Faracy Rosie Mary Holland Becky Marc Maron	Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK)
Edited by Jonathan Schwartz Lee Haxall		
Production Designer Tyler Robinson		
Music Jeff Cardoni		
Supervising Sound Editor Donald Sylvester		
Costume Designer Debra McGuire		
©Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC		
Production Companies Twentieth Century Fox presents in		

New York and Hawaii, present day. Party-loving brothers Mike and Dave Stangle, who usually ruin family events with their unruly behaviour, are told by their parents that they must bring respectable dates to their sister Jeanie's wedding in Hawaii. The boys put up a Craigslist post advertising an all-expenses-paid vacation for their potential dates, resulting in viral fame and a rush of women clamouring to be their dates. The winners are Tatiana and Alice, two party girls posing as, respectively, a teacher and a hedge-fund manager in order to obtain the free holiday. Once in Hawaii, however, they drop the ruse and begin egging on Mike and Dave's antics – until a quad-bike accident leaves Jeanie's face battered and bruised. To make up for the accident, Alice arranges for Jeanie to have an intimate massage – which Mike walks in on moments before discovering Tatiana masturbating his bisexual cousin Terry. The wedding is called off in the squabbling that follows these incidents. Mike, Dave, Tatiana and Alice realise that their self-centred behaviour has caused the break-up and work together to bring off the wedding at the last minute. Mike and Tatiana and Dave and Alice pair off romantically.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Allison Shearmur Anthony Katagas	Madeleine Gavin Production Designer Chris Trujillo Music Rob Simonsen Production Thomas Varga Sound Mixer Melissa Vargas Costume Designer Stunt Co-ordinator Stephen Pope	©Lions Gate Films Inc. Production Companies Lionsgate presents in association with TIK Films (Hong Kong) Limited an Allison Shearmur/ Keep Your Head/ Lionsgate production Executive Producers Jeanne Ryan	Quiyun Long Film Extracts <i>The Matrix</i> (1999)	Sydney Mike Heizer Tommy Colson Baker Ty Juliette Lewis Nancy Delmonico Kimiko Glenn Liv Marc John Jeffries Wes Brian Marc	J.P. Samira Wiley Azhar Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Distributor Lionsgate UK
Screenplay Jessica Sharzer Based on the novel by Jeanne Ryan			Cast Emma Roberts Venus Delmonico, 'Vee' Dave Franco Ian Emily Meade		
Director of Photography Michael Simmonds					
Edited by Jeff McEvoy					

New York, 2020. After being rejected by her crush, introverted Vee subscribes to online dare game 'NERVE', which splits users into Players and Watchers. Vee chooses to be a Player, and is dared by anonymous Watchers to kiss a stranger. She kisses Ian, whereupon \$100 is wired to her account. That night, Watchers persist in pairing up the couple. Dares become increasingly risky (the cash incentive bigger each time), peaking with Vee riding passenger on a motorcycle as Ian, blindfolded, reaches 60mph. The two kiss. Vee's concerned friend Tommy uncovers incriminating video footage of Ian. Vee and best friend Sydney argue. When Vee learns that Ian was dared to instigate the fight, she breaks game rules and tries, unsuccessfully, to notify the police about

'NERVE': Knocked unconscious by another Player, Vee wakes in a shipping container, and is instructed to head to the finals. She meets Tommy and a contrite Sydney, and they set to work to derail the game. In an amphitheatre thronging with Watchers, Vee and fellow finalist Ian are ordered to shoot each other. When they refuse, a runner-up offers to shoot Vee to take the crown. Polled Watchers vote in favour of his bid, whereupon the runner-up appears to shoot Vee dead. Tommy and his hacker team undo the anonymising of users' IP addresses and accuse them of being accessories to murder. All users sign out, crashing the game. Vee reveals to a distraught Ian that the shooting was staged and that the runner-up was in on the plan. Vee and Ian reconcile.

Pete's Dragon

USA 2016

Director: David Lowery

Reviewed by Alex Dudok de Wit

Earlier this year, we were treated to a new version of *The Jungle Book*, complete with swish motion-capture fauna. Next year, we'll be getting a similarly souped-up *Beauty and the Beast*. In the meantime, Disney's relentless remake brigade have set their sights on a lesser-known film from the studio's archives, the whimsical animation/live-action hybrid *Pete's Dragon*.

They could have thought a little further outside the box, for this film – which diverges considerably from the plot of the original – treads similar ground to *The Jungle Book*. Young Pete (Oakes Fegley) survives a car crash that kills his parents and takes refuge in a forest, where he meets kindly dragon Elliot, also orphaned. He settles into a feral life with his reptilian pal, which is only interrupted years later when woodcutters abruptly seize him and take him to the town. There, nobody believes Pete's tall tales of Elliot – except retired forest ranger Mr Meacham (Robert Redford, who as ever looks as if he's just stepped off the set of a shampoo commercial). For years, this man has been regaling the townsfolk with the story of the time he saw a dragon in the woods, which endears him to the local children but casts him as a harmless lunatic in the eyes of everyone else.

The dreamer and the kid: a match made in storytelling heaven. The film's premise may evoke François Truffaut's *The Wild Child* (1970) or Lenny Abrahamson's *Room* (2015), all the more so since Fegley resembles the latter's Jacob Tremblay (although he doesn't share his talent). But whereas those films are concerned with the traumatic process of civilisation, this is lighter fare: a paean to the expansive powers of a child's imagination, no more.

Pete's Dragon is enjoyable enough. It reprises the original's fusion of live action and animation, but it is far more tightly plotted. It looks lovely; as we know from his 2013 Texas-set outlaw drama *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*, director David Lowery has a knack for coaxing a dreamy atmosphere from natural settings. The likeable cast do their



Lord of the wings: Oona Laurence, Oakes Fegley

best with the underwritten roles. And while it's rarely a good idea to review the audience, I should mention that the children in neighbouring seats were well into the action scenes.

Yet I can't help but feel that the film fails on its own terms. It tells us, via Redford, that in life we must look beyond "what's in front of us". But it leaves little to the imagination. The dragon is revealed within minutes of the opening, before any sense of mystery has accumulated. And while accomplished, the dragon's hyperreal CGI animation precludes flights of fancy rather than provoking them. It's all so literal.

I sense that kids closely identify with hand-drawn or puppet animations, comparatively abstract mediums, as they can relate them to their own drawings and dolls. Graphics like this, on the other hand, are mere spectacle: pretty, but remote. Therein lies the main problem with *Pete's Dragon*, and with so many films of its kind. ☹

Popstar Never Stop Never Stopping

USA/Japan 2016, Directors: Akiva Schaffer, Jorma Taccone
Certificate 15 86m 32s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

No man is a Lonely Island. That's the guiding theme of *Popstar: Never Stop Never Stopping*, in which co-directors Jorma Taccone and Akiva Schaffer play the discarded childhood buddies/musical collaborators of an ascendant Justin Bieber-ish chart-topper who learns that he's better off keeping his friends close. That the pop star is played by Andy Samberg – who with Taccone and Schaffer makes up the comic rap trio the Lonely Island, best known for a series of *Saturday Night Live* Digital Shorts – gives the film its shape as a gently self-reflexive allegory.

The leap of faith that audiences have to make with *Popstar's* faux-documentary format is that the songs sung by Samberg's Conner4Real would stand a chance in the mainstream marketplace: as on their albums, the Lonely Island's beat-craft is impressively persuasive, while their lyrics are conspicuously ridiculous ("She wanted me to fuck her like the US government fucked Bin Laden" goes one hook). And yet *Popstar* – like Taccone's *MacGruber* (2012) – belongs on the list of comedies that are smart about being stupid; a cameo by an unrecognisable Weird Al Yankovic as the frontman of a sell-out arena rock band shows that the Lonely Island both recognise and respect the parody tradition they're working, including its responsibility to reflect the mainstream's best and worst tendencies back at itself.

There is thus a fascinatingly double-edged aspect to the parade of industry figures who appear as talking heads validating Conner's stardom (and narrating his descent into alcoholic megalomania): testimonials from the likes of Nas, A\$AP Rocky, DJ Khaled and Usher buttress the joke of the white protagonist's clueless hip-hop appropriation while also giving the Lonely Island's conceptual project some street cred (more than Michael Bolton does, anyway). With this in mind, Chris Redd's performance as Conner's tourmate/rival Hunter the Hungry – a gonzo rapper clearly modelled on Tyler, the Creator – is especially thorny: the script turns



Vocal hero: Andy Samberg

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Jim Whitaker
Screenplay
David Lowery
Toby Halbrooks
Based on a screenplay by Malcolm Marmorstein
Based on a story by Seton I. Miller, S.S. Field

Director of Photography

Bojan Bazelli
Film Editor
Lisa Zeno Churgin
Production Designer
Jade Healy

Original Score

Composed by Daniel Hart
Sound Mixer
Tony Johnson

Costume Designer

Armanda Neale

Visual Effects

& Animation

Created by

Weta Digital Limited

@Disney

Enterprises, Inc.

Production Companies

Disney presents a Whitaker Entertainment production
Executive Producers
Barrie M. Osborne

Cast

Bryce Dallas Howard

Grace

Oakes Fegley

Pete

Wes Bentley

Jack

Karl Urban

Gavin

Oona Laurence

Natalie

Isiah Whitlock Jr

Sheriff Gene Dentler

Robert Redford

Meacham

Marcus Henderson

Woodrow

Aaron Jackson

Abner

Phil Grieve

Bobby

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Some screenings

presented in 3D

Distributor

Buena Vista International (UK)

North-west US, the present. When his parents die in a car crash, five-year-old Pete flees into a forest. There he befriends a giant dragon, which he names Elliot.

Six years later, when local woodcutters are working in the forest, the daughter of one of them spots Pete (who has become feral). The woodcutters capture him and deliver him to the town. He tries to escape, but Grace – a forest ranger who lives with the girl, Natalie, and her father Jack – finds him and takes him home.

Pete speaks about his dragon friend; nobody believes him except Grace's father, a former ranger himself, who claims to have seen a dragon in his youth. Pete takes his new family to see Elliot. The dragon appears, but is captured by Gavin, a woodcutter who has followed them. Elliot is brought to the town and imprisoned in a barn. In secret, Pete and his friends put the wounded dragon on a truck and escape. Gavin gives chase and catches up with them on a bridge; in the ensuing standoff, the bridge crumbles and Elliot saves Grace and her father. Pete flies off with Elliot, but realises that human society is where he belongs. Elliot flies north to find other dragons.

Elliot moves in with Grace's family, but still sees his old friend once in a while.

Raman Raghav 2.0

Director: Anurag Kashyap
Certificate 15 133m 14s

him into a villain who's ultimately vanquished by the Beastie Boys-style white-boy rap of the Lonely Island in (thinly veiled) alter ego mode.

Any accidentally revealing subtext aside, *Popstar* is mostly funny stuff, dropping non sequiturs like gauntlets (a Yelp review for a website providing trained wolves for private parties is best in show) and otherwise executing recycled jokes with aplomb (including a flaccid-penis gag that bears the imprimatur of producer Judd Apatow). Like his spiritual predecessor Adam Sandler, Samberg isn't much of an actor, but he knows how to tweak his affability into petulance and pure sheep-eyed stupidity, and he puts Conner's songs (including a gay-rights anthem that righteously skewers Macklemore) with true idiot conviction. The *Saturday Night Live* connection is strengthened by cameos from a number of alumni, including the always welcome Bill Hader as a guitar tech with a bizarre hobby (not worth spoiling here) and Tim Meadows, who carries memories of the (superior) music-industry pastiche *Walk Hard* and gets a fine saxophone solo to boot. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Judd Apatow
Rodney Rothman
Andy Samberg
Akiva Schaffer
Jorma Taccone
Written by
Andy Samberg
Akiva Schaffer
Jorma Taccone
Director of Photography
Brandon Trost
Editors
Jamie Gross
Craig Alpert
Stacey Schroeder
Production Designer
Jon Billington
Music
Matthew Compton
Production Sound Mixer
Steve Nelson
Costume Designer
Sophie De Rakoff

Production Companies
Universal Pictures
presents in association with
Perfect World
Pictures an Apatow Company/Lonely Island production
A Lonely Island film
Presented in association with
Dentsu Inc./Fuji Television Network, Inc.
Executive Producer
Morgan Sackett
Film Extracts
Flatliners (1990)

Cast
Andy Samberg
Conner Friel
'Kid Conner',
'Conner4Real'
Jorma Taccone
Owen Bouchard,
'Kid Contact'

Akiva Schaffer
Lawrence Dunn,
'Kid Brain'
Sarah Silverman
Paula Klein
Tim Meadows
Harry Duggins
Maya Rudolph
Deborah
Joan Cusack
Tilly Friel
Weird Al Yankovic
Hammerleg
lead singer
Chris Redd
Hunter the Hungry
Bill Hader
Zippy

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Universal Pictures
International (UK)

US, the present. Having abandoned his childhood friends Owen and Lawrence, with whom he formed hip-hop collective the Style Boyz, Conner4Real has gone on to solo success. Owen now acts as Conner's DJ, though Conner has broken with Lawrence, who accused him of stealing material for his breakout single. Conner's new single doesn't perform as well as expected, and a series of PR gaffes leaves his publicists scrambling to limit the damage. Conner's manager suggests that he tour with a new opening act, rapper Hunter the Hungry, whose popularity quickly overshadows his own. Conner lashes out at the members of his inner circle, including Owen, who finally leaves him to work on his own music. Conner's new album and tickets for his concerts don't sell well, and he's sued by Seal, who was injured by rented wolves while performing at the pop star's botched wedding ceremony. Conner watches Owen perform, and is impressed with his music; he and Owen go to see Lawrence, and the Style Boyz reunite in time to perform a new song, 'Incredible Thoughts', at an awards show, backed by Michael Bolton and Conner's personal chef. It's implied that the Style Boyz will have continued success.

Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

After *Bombay Velvet* (2015), the big-budget musical that was critically underrated and a commercial disaster, Anurag Kashyap returns to familiar terrain with *Raman Raghav 2.0*. In films from *Paanch* (2003) and *No Smoking* (2007) to *That Girl in Yellow Boots* (2010) and *Ugly* (2013), Kashyap has explored the dark side of urban Indians, particularly the male of the species, and has come to the conclusion that they are an irredeemable lot. With *Raman Raghav 2.0* he takes that idea and pushes it to its limits. Raman Raghav, aka Sindhi Dalwai, was a real-life psychopath who went on a killing spree in Bombay in the 1960s. Here the serial killer is Ramanna, and on his trail is coke-snorting Mumbai cop Raghavan. Kashyap posits that Ramanna and Raghavan are two sides of the same coin – the murderer who kills for the sake of killing, the cop on a rampage because of his drug habit and daddy issues.

Both characters are equally fascinating. Ramanna is something of a philosopher, with views on organised religion and the situation in Syria. He says proudly that he kills "just like that", without the sanction of religion or humanity, or the authority of police uniform. The film is divided into several chapters and the most chilling is when Ramanna visits his sister's family: he keeps them terrorised while cooking chicken and rice, casually informing his brother-in-law that his sister was a whore whose virginity he had the pleasure of taking. He then proceeds to kill the family, including the doe-eyed six-year-old son. Kashyap keeps all the killings off screen, revealing splashes of gore after the fact, and the brutality of the deaths is all the more effective for that, aided by Nawazuddin Siddiqui's tour-de-force performance as Ramanna.

Kashyap co-wrote with Vasan Bala, who also collaborated on *Bombay Velvet*, and Bala's influence is clearly visible in the Raghavan character. In Bala's directorial debut *Peddlers* (2012), Gulshan Devaiah played Ranjit, a troubled Mumbai narcotics cop who needed Viagra to



It's an unfair cop: Nawazuddin Siddiqui

perform sexually. Raghavan is an extension of Ranjit: he too needs his dosage of Viagra, and is written as a true blue misogynist who refuses to use protection when having sex with his girlfriend Simmy; when she accuses him of being as much a murderer as Ramanna, having been the direct cause of her three abortions, he flies into a rage and threatens her with his police revolver. He also disapproves of her watching a television programme on women's emancipation.

Ultimately, *Raman Raghav 2.0* is a gay stalker love story. It is implied that Ramanna is bisexual, and at one point he reveals to Raghavan that women complete most men but in his case Raghavan completes him. This is not the easiest film to watch, but Kashyap continues his mission to push back the boundaries of Indian cinema. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Vikas Bahl
Vikramaditya Motwane
Written by
Vasan Bala
Anurag Kashyap
Director of Photography
Jay Oza
Editor

Aarti Bajaj
Production Designer
Tiya Tejpalaya
Music
Ram Sampath
Costume Designer
Shruti Kapoor

Production Companies
Reliance

Entertainment
Phantom Production
Executive Producer
Tanvi Gandhi

Cast
Nawazuddin Siddiqui
Ramanna
Vicky Kaushal

Raghavan Singh Ubbi
Sobhita Dhulipala
Simmy
Mukesh Chhabra
Ioan shark
Anuschka Sawhney
Ankita
Amruta Subhash
Lakshmi
Deepali Suryakant
Badekar

Simmy's maid
Ashok Lokhande
brother-in-law
Rajesh Jais
Farid Haq
Vipin Sharma
Raghav's father

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Reliance
Entertainment

Mumbai, 2013. Coke-snorting police officer Raghavan picks up Simmy at a nightclub and asks her to wait in his car while he visits his dealer. He finds the dealer murdered. When the dealer's neighbour arrives on the scene, Raghavan kills him, making it look like a double homicide, and leaves the scene after pocketing some drugs. A man calling himself Sindhi Dalwai (one of the aliases of Raman Raghav, a notorious serial killer who operated in Mumbai in the 1960s), calls the police and turns himself in for these and previous murders. His real name is Ramanna. The police take Ramanna to a safe house and interrogate him. Ramanna claims that he kills on God's instructions. The police leave Ramanna locked up and starving in the safe house. However, Ramanna escapes. He visits his estranged

sister and kills her, her husband and their six-year-old son. Raghavan is now in a casual relationship with Simmy; his refusal to use protection has already led her to have three abortions. Ramanna's killing spree continues, his latest victim being Simmy's maid. An informant tips off the police about Ramanna's whereabouts but he escapes and kills the informant. After a chastening encounter with his father, with whom he has a difficult relationship, Raghavan picks up a woman, Ankita, from a nightclub and takes her to Simmy's. In the ensuing argument, he kills Simmy and makes it look like Ramanna's work. Ankita escapes. Ramanna turns himself in and confesses to Simmy's murder, telling Raghavan that he must kill Ankita, who was a witness to the crime. Raghavan kills Ankita.

River

Canada/USA 2015
Director: Jamie M. Dagg

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

A likeable volunteer doctor working in a non-governmental organisation outside Vientiane in Laos, John Lake – note the watery surname – is what might be called a western do-gooder. In the opening scenes of *River*, Jamie M. Dagg's first feature as writer/director, John (played by Rossif Sutherland) encourages a patient to lay off alcohol – and when a truckload of horrifically injured people arrives at the clinic, he keeps trying to resuscitate a young girl long after senior surgeon Dr Stephanie Novella (Sara Botsford) has declared her dead.

John's insistence on saving the girl places him in a long tradition of male heroes – and yet Stephanie points out that his insubordinate action has consequences, drawing time and attention away from surviving trauma patients. Advised to take some time off and consider his options, John heads south to the river island of Don Khon, where once again he will discourage excessive drinking and try to save a girl. Only this time, the girl has been raped, while unconscious, by the tourist Lachlan (Aidan Gillett) – and in the drunken tussle that ensues on the riverbank, John will accidentally beat Lachlan to death. It is a messy situation. John is plainly guilty of homicide, and the girl, when she regains consciousness, mistakenly believes that it was he who raped her. The fact that Lachlan is the son of an Australian senator only muddies the waters further. Finding himself chief suspect in a rape and murder case that local police are under pressure to resolve quickly, John will panic and go on the run.

Filed in frenetic, often handheld tracking shots that keep closing in, like the forces of Laotian justice, on the would-be hero, *River* is a gripping fish-out-of-water thriller for as long as John keeps running – but Dagg never loses track of John's moral quagmires. When, near the end, he is given 'no choice' but to smuggle a bag of destructive illegal drugs in return for help from the clinic's driver



Just cause: Rossif Sutherland

Douangmany (played by Laos's most prolific producer, Douangmany Soliphanh) to ford the Mekong into Thailand, it is clear that John is crossing an ethical as well as a geographical boundary. He may later be shown scrubbing and drying laundry in a prison, chastened by his experience, but his moral stain remains.

In the closing scenes, John makes a snap decision to run again, only this time towards significantly, by Buddhist monks, he sets off once more to save the girl – though it is a heroic impulse that, as we have seen twice before, can lead to unforeseen and tragic consequences. Accordingly, Dagg ends his film without ever quite closing the narrative circle, leaving viewers to work their own way through the awkward questions raised here about the difficulty of doing good from a position of western (white, male) privilege. They are questions that may well have weighed on Dagg himself as he made what is the first North American film to be shot in the communist dictatorship of Laos. *River* is an impressive debut, offering no easy channel through its shifting, murky waters. Ⓢ

The Shallows

USA 2016
Director: Jaime Collet-Serra
Certificate 15 86m 8s

See Feature
on page 34

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

A movie whose narrative machinations move, literally, with tidal gradation, this mini-thriller couldn't be simpler: Blake Lively, in a bikini, on a rock, stalked by a shark. There once was a day when such a scenario, pitched across a studio producer's desk, would've been a joke, or at least the set-up for one, but somehow today a movie exactly that lean, that devoid of complication or implication, gets a global summer release, and handily multiplies its tiny budget at the box office. Even in a world of sharknados and sharktopi, less, it seems, is sometimes more.

But who hopes for much, given this outline? One feels churlish reviewing it, and even more so coming to look at the deliberate sparseness of plot and character as a manoeuvre to evade criticism altogether. So it's hardly a surprise that what little we get in the way of storytelling is trite and clichéd: Lively's Nancy is a) escaping from life after her mother's death from cancer and b) on hiatus from, conveniently enough, med school. (If she'd been a finance major, this briskly brief film would've been a short.) She chatters like an ADD school kid to the semi-comprehending driver taking her to a 'secret' surf beach on the Mexican west coast (shot in Australia), so we know she'll at least tend to self-dialogue when the going gets lonely. Once she is attacked and wounded and stranded – with helpful inserts of her watch to tell us how long it'll be until high tide subsumes the rock she's on – she MacGyvers a suture rig out of earrings, fixes a damaged gull's dislocated wing (the bird is so companionable you half-expect/half-hope for a talking crab to join them), watches helplessly as various Mexicans (two surfers, a drunk swimming out to steal her board) are devoured, and waits. There's a lot of waiting. It's what you do if you're stuck on a rock far from shore.

For Lively's gamine, there's a certain amount of Not Giving Up as well, just as her mother didn't, the teary strains of inspirational motivation chiming off-key in this corner of the ocean. What this worst-vacation story amounts to is a kind of conflicted minimalism – the narrative is stripped down to one thing, and then, perhaps alarmed, the filmmakers try to trick it up with flash and contrivance, until the climactic face-off is something that makes the unlikely ending of *Jaws* look almost Rossellinian. The cognitive deprivation resulting from such a vacuum of stuffiness gets you thinking about this recent microgenre: the one-note one-hander (Tom Hardy in a car, Ryan Reynolds in a box, Robert Redford in a boat, Sandra Bullock in space, Stephen Dorff in a boot, etc), the ubiquity of which suggests on our part either a quaking dread at the prospect of being alone in this day of hyperconnectivity, or a creeping sense of floundering lonesomeness all the same.

But once that line of contemplation runs dry, you have the film's redoubtable tropical vibe (few films put you in the water quite as immersively) to distract you, and of course Lively, who is lovely, genuine blonde-goddess company even when she's crisscrossed with bruises and blood. She's never boring, though

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Nicholas Sorbara
Written by
Jamie M. Dagg
Director of Photography
Adam Marsden
Edited by
Duff Smith
Production Designer
Courtney Stockstad
Music
Trom
Audio Post Supervisor
Ben Swarbrick
Costume Designer
Jessica Albano

with XYZ Films
A film by Jamie M. Dagg
Executive Producers
Greg Sorbara
Mattie Do
Todd Brown
David Miller
Naveen Prasad
Douangmany Soliphanh
Adam Marsden
Jai Khana
Sanzhar Sultanov
Chris Lowenstein

Cast
Rossif Sutherland
Dr John Lake
Sara Botsford
Dr Stephanie Novella
Douangmany Soliphanh
Douangmany
Vithaya Pansringarm
Chai
Ted Atherton

Patrick Reardon
Yannavoutthi Chanthalongsy
Ban Nakasang
police captain
Karen Glave
consular official
David Sincin
Simon
Aidan Gillett
Lachlan Pratt
Amphaiphun Phommaphunya
Nang Chanh

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Kaleidoscope Film
Distribution

Laos, the present. At a clinic near Vientiane, American volunteer John Lake is asked to take some time off after disobeying senior surgeon Stephanie Novella's order to stop trying to resuscitate a young female patient who has died. John catches a ride with the clinic's driver Douangmany into Vientiane, and then buses to the river island of Don Khon. There he cautions Australian tourist Lachlan to stop plying young local woman Nang with alcohol, and later finds Nang in a state of unconsciousness and partial undress with Lachlan. In the ensuing tussle, Lachlan is killed. Awakening, Nang thinks John is the one who raped her. The following morning, as local police question him about Lachlan (the son of an Australian senator), John flees. Pursued by police, he heads back to Vientiane. After entering the US embassy, he loses his nerve and runs. Douangmany offers to help John cross into Thailand, provided that John bring a bag of opium. In Thailand, John is arrested – but not before jettisoning the drugs. In prison he is informed that there is insufficient evidence for Thailand to extradite him to Laos, and that he is free to go. However, on his way to the airport to return to America, he learns that Nang has been accused of Lachlan's murder. He heads back to Laos.

Star Trek Beyond

Director: Justin Lin
Certificate 12A 122m 14s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

This third iteration of a rebooted franchise, following J.J. Abrams's *Star Trek* (2009) and *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013), has to acknowledge the passing of series veteran Leonard Nimoy – as news reaches this Spock (Zachary Quinto) that his parallel-universe doppelganger, sole survivor of the 'original' *Star Trek* timeline, has died – and also tweak the end credits in the light of the death of comparatively recent regular Anton Yelchin. When Spock receives his counterpart's small box of mementoes, he takes a lingering look at a still of the original series cast, retrieved from the continuity overwritten by the timewarping of Abrams's films.

A fairly underheated element of Simon Pegg and Doug Jung's script is the possible break-up of the new team. Kirk (still suffering from daddy issues that are likely to recur, since Chris Hemsworth – briefly seen as Kirk Sr two films ago – has signed up for the next instalment) is considering a non-flying vice-admiral job, and Spock is estranged from human girlfriend Uhura because he feels a responsibility to further the endangered Vulcan race by seeking a mate from his destroyed home-world (without getting into the complications of the Vulcan mating urge from the well-remembered 'Amok Time' episode). After this new adventure, both men quietly drop these ideas – just as Chris Pine and Quinto renegotiated their contracts to stay with whatever version of the *Enterprise* rolls out of dry dock to replace the one trashed here.

Gene Roddenberry's original *Star Trek* conception (which may have been influenced by the 1956 film *Forbidden Planet*) was a spacefaring science-fiction series with a uniformed ensemble (his other writer or producer credits include cavalry, cop and military shows including *The Lieutenant*, *Police Story* and *West Point*). Realising that he was stronger on the uniform elements – chain of command, differences between officers, the bonding of men in combat – than the ideas-intensive business of creating 'strange new worlds', Roddenberry hired name science-fiction writers such as Theodore Sturgeon, Richard Matheson, Robert Bloch and Harlan Ellison to contribute scripts. Over the course of five or six series and three not-quite-separate film franchises, the science-fiction elements have withered away – the show attracted a fandom in the first place because of the characters and the furniture (the *Enterprise*), not the ideas.

In contrast to Abrams's films, which set out alternate versions of scenarios from the old series (*Into Darkness* reworks *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*), the new movie coins a Roddenberry-esque idea. Rather than the mutated Earth space probe V'Ger of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, a mutated Earth space captain (Idris Elba snarling as a lizard-skinned morphing semi-vampire) reappears as a major threat. A quite subtle revision is made: longstanding criticisms of the military bent of Roddenberry's utopia are addressed by having an actual violent militarist complain that his conflict-based way of life has been wiped out to make way for the 'unity' of the Federation (the way this *Star Trek* franchise wiped out the older ones?) and a blunt statement that Starfleet is not a military force (though



Dinner is surfed: Blake Lively

you'd be hard pressed to credit her for propping up this bad-luck yarn with her acting chops alone. What's left, besides a 100-per-cent CGI shark? If you're lucky, you are not plagued by the real-life questions that helplessly arise: would any shark eat three people entirely (one of them *muy gordo*), and a good amount

of humpback whale, inside six hours? Why do the eight-foot waves the surfers hang ten on completely disappear into placidness once the shark appears? Would a gash on your leg really turn the ocean around you red with what looks like five gallons of blood? Can raw whale oil in seawater catch fire like gasoline? (It can't.)

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Lynn Harris
Matti Leshem

Written by

Anthony Jaswinski

Director of

Photography

Flavio Labiano

Edited by

Joel Negron

Production Designer

Hugh Bateup

Music

Marco Beltrami

Production Mixer

Paul Brincat

Costume

Supervisors

Helen Maggs
Chelsea Staebell

Visual Effects

Important
Looking Pirates
Digital Sandbox
Scanline VFX GmbH

Edited by

Soho VFX

Production Designer

Notorious VFX

Music

Australia

Production Mixer

MELLS
Hammerhead
Productions

Costume

Lola VFX
MPC
Spin VFX

Mammal Studios

Oblique FX
Legend FX

Stunt Co-ordinator

Glenn Ruehlend

©Columbia Pictures
Industries, Inc.

Production

Companies

Columbia Pictures

presents a

Weimaraner Republic

Pictures, Ombr

Films production

A film by Jaume

Collet-Serra

Executive Producers

Doug Merrifield
Jaume Collet-Serra

Cast

Blake Lively

Nancy

Oscar Jaenada

Carlos

Angelo Josue

Lozano Corzo

Jose Manuel

Trujillo Salas

surfers

Brett Cullen

dad

Sedona Legge

Chloe

Diego Espejel

intoxicated man

Janelle Bailey

mom

Ava Dean

young Nancy

Chelsea Moody

young mom

Sully 'Steven'

Seagull

himself

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Sony Pictures
Releasing UK

Mexico, the present. American surfer Nancy is driven to a secret beach once beloved by her mother, who has recently died of cancer. Temporarily abandoning her medical studies, Nancy is on a grieving retreat. While surfing, she is attacked by a shark, which separates her from her board, cuts her leg open and strands her on a low-tide rock. Using her earrings

to close her wound, she struggles to survive as the shark circles. She sees some locals being snatched from their boards and eaten. When high tide looms, she decides to scramble to a nearby buoy, which provides her with some shelter and a flare gun. The shark dismantles the rusted buoy, however, leaving Nancy to try to use herself as bait to lure it to its fate.



To boldly go: John Cho, Anton Yelchin, Karl Urban, Chris Pine, Zachary Quinto, Simon Pegg

It still packs photon torpedoes). It's actually refreshing for a big-screen *Star Trek* to have a 'regular episode' feel, though Elba's Krall is yet another in a line of snarling one-use-only big bads. Giving Pegg his head as writer and actor mostly means better jokes and a rare case of the female guest star (Sofia Boutella) bantering with someone other than the captain, while importing director Justin Lin from the *Fast & Furious* franchise turns out to be a very mixed blessing. The film has well-realised outer-space environments – Krall's mushroom-look encampment and the topsy-turvy city-sized space station feel like photorealistic versions of the matte paintings from the 1960s show – and manages some spectacular crash and battle action (by now the destruction of the *Enterprise* has become a running joke, but the version here is splendid). But jittery, swooping camerawork ill serves many action sequences – chopping things up and

looking from odd angles means that it's hard to tell what heroes and villains are actually doing. Compare the grit, suspense and involvement of 'Arena', the 1967 episode in which William Shatner's unarmed Kirk battles a reptile enemy on an alien planet while the fate of his crew is in the balance, with the noisy, busy, what-the-hell's-going-on? blur of most fight scenes here. It diminishes big characters like Kirk and Spock to lose them in clouds of pixels and rapid edits. Abrams's casting decisions are mostly paying off in the long term, however. As McCoy, Karl Urban especially catches DeForest Kelley's incredulous, irascible tone ("You gave your girlfriend radioactive jewellery?") and Pegg the writer is savvy enough to partner him with Quinto's dry, wry Spock (who follows an often repeated Nimoy gambit by breaking stoneface for a hearty laughing scene). Next time, though, how about getting a science-fiction writer rather than a *Star Trek* fan to script the thing? 📡

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
J.J. Abrams
Roberto Orci
Lindsey Weber
Justin Lin
Written by
Simon Pegg
Doug Jung
Based upon *Star Trek* created by
Gene Roddenberry
Director of Photography
Stephen F. Windon

Edited by
Kelly Matsumoto
Dylan Highsmith
Greg D'Auria
Steven Sprung
Production Designer
Thomas Sanders
Music
Michael Giacchino
Production Sound Mixer
David Husby
Costume Designer
Sanja Hays

Production Companies
Paramount Pictures
and Skydance present
a Bad Robot/Sneaky
Shark/Perfect Storm
Entertainment
production
Executive Producers
Jeffrey Chernov
David Ellison
Dana Goldberg
Tommy Harper

Cast
John Cho
Sulu
Simon Pegg
Montgomery
Scott, 'Scotty'
Chris Pine
Captain James T. Kirk
Zachary Quinto
Commander Spock
Zoë Saldana
Lieutenant Uhura
Karl Urban
Dr 'Bones' McCoy

Anton Yelchin
Pavel Chekov
Sofia Boutella
Jaylah
Idris Elba
Krall
Joe Taslim
Manas
Lydia Wilson
Kalara

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor
Paramount
Pictures UK

**Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]**

Stardate 2263.2. The Starship 'Enterprise' is lured away from the Federation's Yorktown space station by Kalara, who claims that she is the leader of a scientific expedition and needs help rescuing her stranded crew from a remote planet. In fact, Kalara is in league with Krall, who plans to destroy Starfleet and the Federation and needs an artefact presently stored on the 'Enterprise' to activate an ancient doomsday bioweapon. The 'Enterprise' is destroyed by a swarm of Krall's insectile drone ships, and Krall recovers the artefact. Captain James T. Kirk, Commander Spock, Dr McCoy and Engineer Scott – in

league with Jaylah, survivor of a crew slaughtered by Krall – rescue the crew of the 'Enterprise' and refit the 'Franklin', a ship that crashlanded on the planet before the establishment of the Federation. Kirk realises that Krall is in fact Captain Balthazar Edison, a mutated human who resents the abandonment of the militarism of Earth's initial expansion into space in favour of the cooperative approach taken by Starfleet and the Federation. Using the Franklin, Kirk pursues Krall to Yorktown – where Scotty disrupts the swarm's communications with loud 20th-century music and Kirk defeats Krall in combat.

Swallows and Amazons

United Kingdom/France 2016
Director: Philippa Lowthorpe

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

What reason can there be for remaking a film about the bucolic summer holiday of four white, middle-class children, one of whom – in the source text – is called Titty, a name no child was ever given after 1960? Surely BBC Films, producer of *Swallows and Amazons*, has a list as long as its proverbial arm of original stories of wider application, more deserving of financial backing than this adaptation of a book written nearly 90 years ago? At a preview screening, director Philippa Lowthorpe, who has worked predominantly in television (*Jamaica Inn*, *Call the Midwife*), and writer Andrea Gibb gave the same reason: to remind today's children – hunched over iPads, bent on digital play – of the pleasures of the great outdoors. The reason is a good one, but is the film a successful exhortation to get up and step outside? I'm not so sure.

Lowthorpe and Gibb distrust their target audience. To hold the (they would say) played-out attentions of the 21st-century kid, they have introduced into the story a second plot strand, equal in size to the original; they have grafted, more or less, the real exploits of the book's author, a sometime MI6 agent, on to its imagined antagonist Jim Turner, known to the pirate-obsessed Walker children as Captain Flint. Gibb's script has Turner tailed by two Russians in overcoats, who (rightly) suspect him of harbouring on his houseboat documents detailing Russian military secrets.

The absencing of the Walker children's father constitutes a further change to the narrative, so that it resembles that of another countryside-set classic, *The Railway Children*, in which the father is wrongfully imprisoned for selling state secrets. Needless to say, the new release does not live up to Lionel Jeffries's excellent 1970 film adaptation. It was a mistake to try to remake *Swallows and Amazons* in *The Railway Children*'s image for several reasons, the foremost being that Arthur Ransome's novel is a different animal. Where Edith Nesbit's *The Railway Children* was initially serialised, and the film correspondingly episodic, it is a strength of Ransome's book that it tells *one* story, and tells it in absorbing detail. In recounting the boating adventures of the Walker siblings (the Swallows) and their rivals-then-allies the Blackett sisters (the Amazons), the book becomes a treasure chest of information – information to be mapped on to a voyage of one's own. It does not spare the reader the technicalities of sailing – of tacking, of ducking the boom, of 'leading lights' – but rather prepares her, a service not provided by this film.

No child will emerge from the cinema equipped to embark on a copycat trip, because the B-story bleeds the boating alliance of the Swallows and the Amazons of its high definition. The film fails its audience by not recognising that the single-minded thoroughness of the book is its main attraction. It is not enough to namecheck pemmican. The viewer, like the reader, wishes to have itemised *all* that's loaded on to the boat and taken to the island; she wants inventories and intelligence.

Without doubt, Lowthorpe is a gifted director, drawing – as she has done before, in *Cider with Rosie* (2015), for instance – great performances



The sure thing: *Swallows and Amazons*

from child actors. Julian Court's dynamic cinematography sustains interest, the camera lens frequently adopting the point of view of a child – sometimes held under the chin, like a buttercup. The lighting is occasionally ingenious, as with the image of able seaman Tatty (as Titty is now renamed) alone at night in the stolen *Amazon*, the air above the water alive with flying insects. The film's costliest mistakes, however, preceded this kind of invention. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Nicholas Barton
Nick O'Hagan
Joe Oppenheimer

Written by

Andrea Gibb
Based on the book
by Arthur Ransome

Director of

Photography
Julian Court

Editor

David Thrasher

Production

Designer

Suzie Davies

Composer

Ilan Eshkeri

Production

Sound Mixer

Martin Beresford

Costume Designer

Amy Roberts

©Secret Harbour
Films Limited/
British Broadcasting
Corporation/The
British Film Institute

Production

Companies

BBC Films, BFI

and Hanway

Films present in

association with

Screen Yorkshire,

The Electric Shadow

Company, Maiden

Investments a

Harbour Pictures

production

By special

arrangement with

Studioscanal

Developed in

association with

BBC Films

Made with the

support of the

BFI's Film Fund

Executive

Producers

Christine Langan

Beth Pattinson

Natascha Wharton

Peter Watson

Thorsten

Schumacher

Patrick Fischer

Hugo Heppell

Alexa Seligman

John Jencks

Jenny Borgars

Dan MacRae

Danny Perkins

Steve Milne

Ian Maiden

Cast

Rafe Spall

James Turner, 'Jim',

'Captain Flint' /

Polski the Parrot

Andrew Scott

Lazlov

Kelly Macdonald

Mrs Walker

Dane Hughes

John Walker

Oria Hill

Susan Walker

Teddie

Malleson-Allen

Tatty Walker

Bobby McCulloch

Roger Walker

Seren Hawkes

Nancy Blackett

Hannah-Jayne

Thorp

Peggy Blackett

Jessica Hynes

Mrs Jackson

Harry Enfield

Mr Jackson

Dan Skinner

Zukin

Fenella Woolgar

Miss Crummock

Elizabeth

Berrington

Mrs Blackett

John Henshaw

harbour master

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Studioscanal Limited

Things to Come

France/Germany 2016

Director: Mia Hansen-Løve

Certificate 12A 101m 48s



The long view: Isabelle Huppert

See Feature
on page 24

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Only in a Mia Hansen-Løve film would the discovery of 'The Unabomber Manifesto' in an anarchist commune prompt a discussion about the gap between thought and action rather than a call to the police. No-nonsense fiftysomething commune guest and heroine Nathalie (an enjoyably brusque Isabelle Huppert) pursues her interesting find with a curt rationality that uncovers a fading friendship, not a hot conspiracy. It's a neat move, typical of writer-director Hansen-Løve, who excels at taking potentially melodramatic situations and defusing them with careful emotional truths. Her films often centre on characters working through disaster or upheaval: the suicidal lovesick teen of *Goodbye First Love* (2011), the family tragedy of *Father of My Children* (2009). In the wry, humane and thoughtful *Things to Come*, Nathalie's late middle age is upended by a sudden eruption in her marriage, professional setbacks and the death of her demanding elderly mother. Yet the film treats this destabilising cluster of crises with extraordinary restraint.

Moments of high drama – the discovery of an affair, a dash to a suicide call – are despatched in a matter-of-fact manner, without fuss. Edith Scob's neurotic, autocratic mother, a relentless and lonely botherer of the emergency services, is viewed with a flash of humorous sympathy rather than pity as she's put into residential care ("These old folks make me want to puke"). And Huppert sums up a welter of suppressed emotions in a rueful, self-deprecating shrug as Nathalie greets the sudden news that her 25-year marriage is over: "But I thought you would love me for ever. What a fool."

Able to slide from irritable to vulnerable within a sentence, Huppert is a sheer delight here, whether flirting with her radical intellectual protégé Fabien in front of her eye-rolling adult children, or shoving her husband's farewell flowers savagely into the bin. Nathalie, a

rigorously intelligent philosophy teacher, gives the actress a chance to utilise her often prickly screen persona to fine effect. It's tempered nicely by that tough-and-tender stubbornness she paraded in *White Material* and in another tale of sudden midlife crisis, *Villa Amalia* (both 2009). Since Nathalie commands so much of the action, the surrounding characters, including her stolid, Kant-struck husband Heinz (André Marcon), are inevitably less well realised, though Roman Kolinka's Fabien, as unsure as Nathalie whether they are edging towards a sexual or a scholarly bond, has a nice ambivalence about him.

One of the film's most enjoyable aspects is its ability to show Nathalie's unnerving freedom in all its ups and downs rather than as a hackneyed journey of self-discovery. Hansen-Løve's script waits and watches patiently, without judging. It turns Nathalie's self-pitying sobs on a Parisian bus into a peal of incredulous laughter at the cliché of spotting Heinz and his new love through the window. Working hard to find both the images and the tone that will convey the intricacies of Nathalie's situation, the film still retains a welcome briskness that mimics Huppert's impatient stride, in contrast to the meandering pace that made Hansen-Løve's 2014 *Eden* less focused. Stylistically unshowy but with a delicacy of composition that emphasises experience over drama, Denis Lenoir's camerawork creates gorgeous Rohmerish moments, such as the sunlit grassy landscape that embraces a defiantly solitary Nathalie at her lowest point. Defiantly un-Rohmerish, however, is the film's ever present music, helpfully pointing up loss (Schubert), radicalism (Woody Guthrie) and the sharp, unexpected delight of a grandchild ('A la claire fontaine', possibly the most wistful, lovelorn lullaby ever composed).

"I'm lucky to be fulfilled intellectually," Nathalie remarks to Fabien when discussing her capsizing life, and for once this isn't an abandoned wife's juicy rationalisation. Philosophy and its uses and abuses are woven thickly through the script, as when Nathalie



The Lake District, 1935. Siblings John, Susan, Tatty and Roger holiday with their mother at a farm. They break a window in Jim Turner's houseboat, and he calls at the farm to caution them. In a dinghy named 'Swallow', the four sail to an island in the lake, and set up camp. 'Swallow' is ambushed by 'Amazon', the Blackett sisters' boat. Roger, encountering one of two Russians following Turner (who is a spy), drops John's knife in fear. The Swallows and Amazons declare war: the island will belong to the team that takes both boats into their possession. Turner, finding his chest stolen and John's knife at the scene, notifies the harbour master, only to be abducted by the true intruders, the Russians. Tatty captures 'Amazon'; the Swallows win. The two clans unite to rescue Turner, using their dinghies to delay the take-off of a Russian seaplane. The Russians are arrested. The children make Turner walk the plank.

responds to student demonstrations by setting her class to consider Rousseau's theory-versus-practice thoughts on democracy. Unabashedly bookish, the film is acute and often slyly funny about the succour (and snobberies) of the life of the mind for Parisian intellectuals. Nathalie rages at the ravages of divorce on her bookshelves (the loss of a hand-annotated Levinas grieves her especially) and at her publisher's cack-handed attempts to 'humanise' her austere philosophy textbooks. That this isn't simply intellectual window-dressing is underlined when Nathalie's poignant address at her mother's funeral enlists one of Pascal's Pensées to mirror her own spiralling uncertainty: "I know neither my condition nor my duty." In time, Rousseau and her own cussed self-sufficiency can even help her rally, and soldier on ("If happiness fails to come, hope persists"). Yet despite its high-mindedness, the film's real art lies in its ability to present the hard and complex business of surviving life in a disarmingly simple way. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Charles Gillibert
Written by
Mia Hansen-Love
Director of Photography
Denis Lenoir
Editor
Marion Monnier
Art Director
Anna Falguères
Sound
Vincent Vatoux
Costume Designer
Rachel Raoult

©CG Cinéma,
Detailfilm, Arte
France Cinéma,
Rhône-Alpes Cinéma
Production Companies
Charles Gillibert
presents a CG
Cinéma, Detailfilm,
Arte France Cinéma,
Rhône-Alpes Cinéma

co-production
with the participation
of CNC, Canal+,
Arte France, the
Region Rhône-Alpes,
HessenInvestFilm,
FFA Filmförderung-
sanstalt
in association with
Cofinova 12 and
Cinéma 10
A CG Cinéma,
Detailfilm, Arte
France Cinéma,
Rhône-Alpes Cinéma
co-production
with the participation
of Land Hessen
in association
with Soficinéma 11
Développement
with the support
of the Procirep
Film Extracts
Copie conforme/
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(2010)

Cast
Isabelle Huppert
Nathalie Chazeaux
André Marcon
Heinz
Roman Kolinka
Fabien
Édith Scob
Yvette
Sarah Le Picard
Chloé
Solal Forte
Johann

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Curzon Artificial Eye

French theatrical title
L'Avénir

Paris, present day. Nathalie is a philosophy teacher whose neurotic elderly mother Yvette calls her constantly. Nathalie's grown children have left home. Once a radical, she crosses the student picket line at her lycée, determined to teach. Her protégé, young writer Fabien, joins an anarchist farm commune in the country. Nathalie's marriage to Heinz and her prestigious philosophy textbook series are both under threat. Yvette makes nuisance calls to the emergency services, and they refuse to come out to her any more. Nathalie moves her to a retirement home. Nathalie and Heinz's daughter discover that Heinz is being unfaithful, and make him choose. He leaves Nathalie. She crossly clears out their summer home in Brittany with him. Yvette takes to her bed, and dies suddenly. The textbook series is cancelled. Nathalie visits Fabien's commune. She grows fond of Yvette's cat Pandora. The commune's earnest discussions alienate her. Fabien's ideas are too radical for their friendship. Nathalie cuts her visit short.

One year later, Nathalie's daughter has a baby son. Nathalie visits the commune, bringing Pandora to live there. Fabien is in a relationship and has mellowed, but their bond is over. Making Christmas dinner for her children, Nathalie shoos a lonely Heinz away. Once more in charge of her life, she comforts the crying baby while the adults eat.

Tickled

New Zealand/USA 2016
Directors: David Farrier, Dylan Reeve
Certificate 15 92m 0s

Reviewed by Nikki Baughan

The innocent-slash-erotic act of tickling may not seem to have a lot in common with the world of Scientology but, as this entertaining documentary shows, the two share a business model of secrets, lies and threats. As a film, too, *Tickled* is reminiscent of Alex Gibney's Scientology doc *Going Clear* (2015), expertly constructed to narratively ring-fence its slippery subject.

Drawing obvious comparisons to Louis Theroux, softly spoken New Zealand journalist David Farrier plays a key role in the film. His deadpan impassivity proves essential ballast in the outré underworld he cracks open after he stumbles on online videos of competitive tickling, in which adult men are restrained and tickled, supposedly in the name of sport. Investigations into what he believes will be an amusement, or at worst a harmless fetish, lead to Jane O'Brien Media, a global organisation with roots in the deepest Wall Street pockets, which will stop at nothing – offensive correspondence, lawsuits, death threats – to deter the filmmakers.

As laughter turns more serious, the filmmakers navigate the changing tone with confidence. Cinematic sequences, in which slow motion and a bombastic score underline the subject's inherent silliness, give way to sombre talking heads (with former employees, tickling enthusiasts and other investigative journalists) and handheld camera confrontations, as revelations of the company's bullying, harassment and aggression grow ever more dark.

The film then becomes a gripping exposé of the seismic class imbalance that permeates every societal niche, with monied individuals riding roughshod over the less fortunate no matter their kink. (Particularly poignant is an interview with an impoverished former tickler in the crumbling industrial town of Muskegon, Michigan.) And, by the time of a surprising final-reel confrontation, *Tickled* has transcended its playful title to become a resonant, cautionary David and Goliath tale. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Carthew Neal
Cinematographer
Dominic Fryer
Editor
Simon Coldrick
Original Score
Rodi Kirkcaldy
Florian Zwiernig
Sound Recordist
Cameron Lenart

©A Tickish
Tale Limited
Production Companies
New Zealand Film

Commission in
association with
MPI Media Group &
Magnolia Pictures &
HBO Documentary
Films and Stephen
Fry present a Fumes
and Horseshoe film
Executive Producers
Justin Pemberton
for HBO:
Sheila Nevins

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

Documentary. When New Zealand reporter David Farrier stumbles on a competitive tickling video and contacts US organisers Jane O'Brien Media, he receives in reply a stream of abuse and legal threats. Discovering that they are not alone in experiencing such aggressive behaviour, Farrier and co-director Dylan Reeve investigate this lucrative, shadowy business.

Traders

Ireland 2015
Directors: Rachael Moriarty, Peter Murphy
Certificate 15 90m 50s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The trouble with *Traders* is not that its plot is utterly ludicrous, but that it is rendered so matter-of-factly. From the central concept of 'trading' down to the behavioural minutiae, very little of it is psychologically or indeed generally plausible. Although the promise of black comedy – which might abrogate these flaws – is held out, it is never delivered, and the tone is instead consistently grim. 'Trading' is what a recently unemployed tech support officer in a bust Dublin bank comes up with as a way to replace his lost income. After the 'econcicide' – economically motivated suicide – of a former co-worker, fat Englishman Vernon (John Bradley) establishes a site on the dark web through which pairs of similarly suicidal people of equal wealth can agree to 'trade': each will liquidate their assets, put them in a sports bag, write a suicide note, then meet at an abandoned spot, dig a grave and fight to the death. Winner takes all.

Although he lives with his parents and presumably stands to make money from his website – and despite his obvious physical incapacity – Vernon invites another former co-worker, Harry (Killian Scott), to trade for €5,000. Harry's situation doesn't appear any more conducive to this rash course of action: although he is apparently stupid enough to live in a large flat far beyond his means after losing his job as an asset manager, he does have an income, having been able to find a new job right away. Nothing in the film makes their decision remotely believable – neither is suicidal, neither is psychotic, and the risk of being caught is enormous. As things turn out, Vernon calls off the deal after accidentally stabbing himself, and for most of the rest of the film it is Harry who becomes the main 'trader', building up a small fortune through murder – without at any



Asset mismanagement: Killian Scott

Valley of Love

France/Belgium 2015
Director: Guillaume Nicloux
Certificate 15 92m 3s

See Feature
on page 18

Reviewed by Sue Harris

This intimate two-hander reunites two of France's biggest stars, Gérard Depardieu and Isabelle Huppert, for the first time since their youthful romance in Maurice Pialat's acclaimed *Loulou* (1980). Their shared cinematic past – both as characters and as veterans of the French industry – lends poignancy to a fictional encounter that sits at the boundary of past and present, fiction and reality. Here the stars play grieving parents who happen to be called Gérard and Isabelle, and who also happen to be celebrity figures in France.

Director Guillaume Nicloux clearly delights in this repurposing of his stars as alternate versions of themselves, and invites the audience to share in the pleasure of his delicate balancing act. It gives a compelling sense of authenticity to an evident unspoken complicity between the two, and their easy exchanges have a flavour of improvisation: it is as if much of the film is a fly-on-the-wall exercise, capturing the offscreen conversations between a Depardieu and a Huppert who might have been, had they actually once been married. Visiting Death Valley, California, to honour the last wishes of their deceased son, they are cornered by some brash American tourists who can't quite place them out of context but know the value of a celebrity encounter; they respond with weary politeness, as if replaying a scene from their lives for the millionth time. "Who do you think you are? Your films are shit," the offended husband tells a nonplussed Gérard who, believing he will never see his opportunistic importuner again, signs the requested autograph Bob de Niro. "Which one of you is the most famous in France, then?" asks the man's all too bland wife as they sit down for an awkward drink. Isabelle simply shrugs.

But this playfulness has a reverse side too. The characters are deeply overshadowed by the real Gérard and Isabelle: the unmaternal mother *par excellence* of French cinema, and the flawed father who lost his estranged son Guillaume to an early death at the age of 37. The backstory of these unanchored parents and regretful lovers is painfully amplified by the many incarnations of themselves that are layered on to the characters. We sense the deep fragility of



Reunion: Gérard Depardieu, Isabelle Huppert

lives that are familiar yet ever strange to us, lives of people whose names and stories we know well, without ever actually knowing *them*.

Critics have been talking about Depardieu's renaissance for some time now, and this film will only add to the accolades. While Huppert is unsurprisingly excellent as the fragile but stoic mother, it is Depardieu who is at the heart of the film's undercurrent of suffering and abjection. When Isabelle tells Gérard, whom she hasn't seen for years, "You look well," his reply speaks to everything the audience might suspect in seeing him inhabit his own bloated, ageing body so painfully: "How could I possibly feel good like this?"

The melancholic drive of Nicloux's film is anchored not in the tragedy of the son's suicide and the posthumous pact established with his confused parents but in the suffering we witness Depardieu undergo physically in the sweltering, beautiful but brutal landscape of Death Valley. His altered form – the vast belly, the bull neck, the thick limbs, the laboured breathing – is a handicap in this heat, a literal burden that he hauls up hillsides and across rocks like some kind of penance for both the loss of the fictional son and for what he has become. It is the star himself who haunts the film: the memory of his own lost youth resonates throughout this aching study in grief, guilt and memory. ☹

moment attracting the attention of the police.

Early on, Harry remarks in voiceover, "They say that the most successful entrepreneurs have the same personality traits as psychopaths," but the thought is oddly underdeveloped, partly because Harry lacks a personality. Early on, in a possible nod to *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013), he declines to "bore you with the details" of asset management. But without them, Harry is just a generic guy in his twenties, and what might have been a sharp satire in the mode of *American Psycho* (2000) is instead simply a series of murders with nothing specific to say about the mindset of bankers or the world they have made. Worse, in an unresolved subplot, Harry appears to form a genuine bond with Orla (Nika McGuigan). When he decides to get out of the murder game and make a new life with her, there is the suggestion that we might sympathise with him. The film's opening in an abandoned housing project, relic of the property boom, is more of an inadvertent comment on the film's lack of development than on the financial crisis. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Stuart Switzer Libby Durdy Rachel Lysaght Written by Rachael Moriarty Peter Murphy Director of Photography Peter Robertson Editor Joe McElwaine Production Designer Francis Taaffe Production Sound Mixer Robert Flanagan Costume Designer Judith Williams	Film Board presents in association with Coco Developed with the assistance of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/the Irish Film Board Executive Producers Paul Higgins Linda Cullen Rory Gilmartin	Laurence Kinlan Gerry, 'Ger' David Murray Kevin In Colour [L78:1] Distributor Studiocanal Limited
@Coco Production Companies Bord Scannán na hÉireann/the Irish	Cast Killian Scott Harry Fox John Bradley Vernon Stynes Nika McGuigan Orla Johnson Peter O'Meara Anthony Grogan Barry Keoghan Ken	

Dublin, the present or recent past. The former employees of an asset management firm that collapsed with losses of €14bn find it difficult to find new work. After Kevin, a middle-aged manager with numerous children to support, kills himself in an act of 'eiconicide', overweight computer technician Vernon devises a moneymaking scheme. He establishes a site on the dark web that will match up high-net-worth individuals who are thinking of killing themselves; each pair will then fight to the death, the victor taking the loser's money.

Vernon first tries to make a 'trade' of this kind with his friend Harry, but backs out after accidentally stabbing himself. Vernon recuperates in Harry's flat, while Harry, whose new data-entry job does not earn him enough to cover his mortgage repayments, becomes an adept trader, building up a small fortune through serial killing. Harry begins to court Orla, whom Vernon is also interested in. He vows to do one last job before running away with Orla and starting afresh. When Vernon has recovered, he decides to hire more experienced killers to do the trading, with initial success. However, ex-convict Anthony double-crosses him, and with his friend Gerry schemes to steal Harry's accumulated winnings at gunpoint. Harry manages to kill Gerry, and Vernon kills Anthony. Later, Harry kills Vernon, and promises himself yet again that the next job will be his last.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Sylvie Pialat Benoît Quainon	Music Charles Ives	DD Productions, SCOPE Pictures	11. Soficinéma 11, Palatine Etoile 12	SCOPE Invest	In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles
Sound Olivier Dô-Hiù	Sound Pierre Choukroun Fanny Weinzaepflen	Production Companies A Les Films du Worso, LGM Cinéma, Scope Pictures, France 3 Cinéma, DD Productions, Cinéfeel	With the participation of Canal+, France Télévisions, Le Pacte, Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée	Cast Isabelle Huppert Isabelle Gérard Depardieu Gérard Aurélia Thierrée Katherine Dan Warner Paul	Distributor Curzon Artificial Eye
Screenplay Guillaume Nicloux	Costumes Anaïs Romand	Prod co-production in association with Cinéma 9, Cofinova	With the support of Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral Belge via		
Director of Photography Christophe Offenstien					
Editor Guy Lecorne					
Art Director Olivier Radot	@Les Films du Worso, LGM Cinéma, France 3 Cinéma,				

California, the present. Gérard and Isabelle, a divorced couple, meet at a resort in Death Valley to honour the last request of their deceased son Michael, who has committed suicide. Michael left letters for his parents, asking them to spend a week together in the Californian desert on a date he has set for them. His letters inform them that if they follow a specific itinerary throughout

the week, he will reappear to them. Gérard is sceptical, while Isabelle desperately hopes for the impossible. They spend their days together in the blistering heat, going from site to site, talking about their lives, their past and their son. In the end, both come to believe that he is in some way present in this place, and they emerge from their week altered by their experience.

The Wait

Italy/France 2015
Director: Piero Messina
Certificate 12A 100m 12s

Reviewed by Mary Harrod

The pairing of European art cinema and horror aesthetics has developed a certain pedigree across both esoteric and more mainstream circuits in recent times, from French 'New Extreme' auteur fare by Claire Denis or Marina de Van to upscale genre films such as Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others* (2001). We see it again in the enigmatic opening sequences of *The Wait*, where a cruciform Christ dangles like a hanged man, a young girl's dark hoodie is framed to resemble a medieval widow's cape, and a Madonna partly encased in black plastic looks corpse-like against a bleak Sicilian landscape. This is a film, then, that revels in appearances – and what they dissimulate.

At first we are given only lush cinematography and puzzle pieces. Whose funeral is taking place? Why is Jeanne, a young Frenchwoman, here? It is suggested early on that the deceased person may well be her boyfriend Giuseppe, but not conclusively. And even then the questions multiply: what are the motives of Giuseppe's mother Anna? What happened last summer?

Viewers could be forgiven for feeling irritated at being toyed with, even as they admire debut director Piero Messina's virtuosic cinematography, attesting to his background as assistant director on the splendid *The Great Beauty* (2013). A scene where the camera moves from the celestial Mediterranean sky to plunge us directly into the depths of a lake stands out more for its arresting visual qualities than for its place within the



Juliette Binoche

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Nicola Giuliano
Francesca Cima
Carlotta Calori

Screenplay

Giacomo Bendotti
Ilaria Macchia
Andrea Paolo Massara
Piero Messina

Story

Giacomo Bendotti
Ilaria Macchia
Andrea Paolo Massara
Piero Messina
Loosely based on
La vita che ti diedi
by Luigi Pirandello

Director of Photography

Francesco Di Giacomo

Editor

Paola Freddi

Art Director

Marco Dentici

Original Music

Alma Napolitano

Live Sound

Marco Mangani

Costume Designer

Alessandro Rolla

Production Companies

Maurizio Millenotti

@Indigo Film, Barbary

Films, Pathé

Production Companies

Nicola Giuliano

and Francesca

Cima present

An Indigo Film

production

in collaboration

with Medusa Film

in association with

Banca Nuova S.p.A.,

Renato Ragosta

Team Holding S.r.l.

An Indigo Film,

Barbary Films, Pathé

co-production

Realised with the

support of Eurimages

Developed with

the support of

Programma Media

Della Comunità

Europea

Produced with

the assistance of

Ministero dei beni

e delle attività

culturali e del turismo

Direzione Generale

per il cinema

with the support of

Regione Siciliana

Assessorato

Turismo Sport e

Spettacolo under

the program "Sensi

Contemporanei

Cinema e Audiovisivo"

in collaboration with

Mediaset Premium

Executive Producer

Viola Prestieri

Cast

Juliette Binoche

Anna

Lou de Laâge

Jeanne

Giorgio Colangeli

Pietro

Domenico Diele

Giorgio

Antonio Folletto

Paolo

Corinna Lo Castro

Rosa

Giovanni Anzaldo

Giuseppe

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Studiocanal Limited

Italian theatrical title

L'attesa

somewhat hackneyed symbolic transcendence-entropy interplay on which the film draws, via the dialogue between religious and macabre iconography, as well as between speech/music and silence. Moody score is thus an intermittent but key contributor to the film's tenor, as with Leonard Cohen's 'Waiting for the Miracle', played over a sultry dancing scene two thirds in, also lending narrative its title. This underlines with heavy-handed irony the absence of any resurrection offered up here.

Instead, we are invited to interpret Anna's behaviour as a bizarre way of coming to terms with losing her son. Thus his final 'return' and disappearance into the spectacular, hooded figures of the climactic Easter parade is coded as fantasy by the fact that his face remains hidden, while Jeanne's discovery of his phone lends it by association the status of a moment of confronting truth. And the film is unexpectedly transformed from something akin to an extended, slow-paced advertisement for luxury rural lifestyles to a story with real emotional depth once the improbable plot confusions are dispensed with in favour of psychological truths. While Lou de Laâge is convincing as the gauche interloper Jeanne, Juliette Binoche's performance as Anna, channelling her previous associations with both trauma and perversity (as well as multiple European contexts), is crucial here.

In the end, *The Wait* could be seen as a feminised successor to 1960's *L'avventura* (featuring another elusive Anna), where an initial disappearance is gradually eclipsed by a focus on the relationship between those left behind, and also an evocation of the absence of human narratives for dealing with loss, all the more moving here for the film's unexpected final understatement. ☺

The Wave

Norway/Sweden/Denmark 2015
Director: Roar Uthaug
Certificate 15 105m 15s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

The Wave is a curiosity among disaster films – and not only because it comes from Norway, more famous for stave church burnings than Irwin Allen-style spectacle. It's odd because it doesn't particularly seem to relish the sight of destruction and carnage. The movie, which takes place immediately before, after and during the moment when a humongous tsunami wave wipes the prim, touristic village of Geiranger off of the coast of the Geirangerfjord, treats no death cheaply. None of Jim Cameron's *Titanic* passengers pinball-caroming about for fun here; it's nobody left behind, and no body left without lingering tribute from the camera. This is, of course, the morally correct attitude, but I wonder what anyone looking for respectable, conscientious entertainment is doing watching a disaster movie in the first place, much less making one. Director Roar Uthaug does give the event itself a measure of awe, coming after much build-up and a prologue that connects it to actual natural catastrophes in Norway's history, but if you're going to decimate a scenic village for an evening's entertainment you need to be a lord of chaos, and despite his fierce-sounding name, there's a sense that poor Roar feels awful that all of this had to happen to such a pristine place.

We principally see it as it happens to a single family unit, sundered as the cliffsides around Geiranger crack, and reunited after great tribulation in time for the credits. The father, Kristian, is a geologist haunted by premonitions of the catastrophe – the part is played by Kristoffer Joner, an actor with a vaguely Kevin Baconesque quality who is quite a to-do in Norway and probably best recognised in the rest of the world as one of the flatboat rats of *The Revenant*. Kristian has to wend his way through a quaint picture postcard turned into a razed hellscape in order to reunite with his wife Idu (Ane Dahl Torp) and teenage son Sondre (Jonas Hoff Ottebro); they've taken shelter inside a rapidly flooding underground bomb shelter with an adult male acquaintance who, they discover, is prone to violent panic attacks. The solution they come up with to deal with this problem – a testament to maternal love in the form of an authoritative leg-lock – is the one moment when the movie shows a flash of true nastiness.

Uthaug isn't a hack – not yet, at least, though



Making waves: Mette Horn, Ane Dahl Torp

Sicily, present day. A funeral takes place at a country house during Holy Week. Meanwhile a young French girl, Jeanne, travels across the barren countryside by taxi. On arrival, she is told that Anna, the mistress of the house, is indisposed. She leaves a message for her boyfriend Giuseppe, Anna's son, asking where he is. The next day, Anna evades further questions about Giuseppe's whereabouts, telling Jeanne that they are mourning her brother. Giuseppe, she claims, will arrive for Easter. Jeanne decides to wait for him, spending her time talking to Anna and casually flirting with local boys. She leaves exasperated messages on Giuseppe's phone, wondering if he is absent because he has not forgiven her for unspecified events the previous summer. Anna

receives these messages, since she has Giuseppe's phone. Her motives for keeping this a secret are unclear, as she and Jeanne appear to develop a certain closeness – until Anna's servant challenges her to tell Jeanne the truth: that Giuseppe is not coming back.

When Easter arrives, Anna tells Jeanne that Giuseppe has left her and that she should go home for her own good. That night, Anna is apparently awoken by her son returning; together they attend the local Easter parade, where he becomes lost in the crowd. While packing, Jeanne finds Giuseppe's phone and listens to an anxious message from Anna, asking where he is. She breaks down. When Anna returns, they exchange an anguished embrace.

Wiener-Dog

USA 2015
Director: Todd Solondz

See Feature
on page 44

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Alan Bennett once wrote about Philip Larkin: "Where melancholy is concerned Larkin is such a missionary. It's not enough that he sees the world as he does: we must see it, too, and feel as depressed about it." It's a verdict that would fit Todd Solondz rather well. Coming from virtually any other filmmaker, a four-part story based around a cute dachshund could be counted on to furnish a movie heart-warming to the point of nausea. From Solondz, it's a pretext for demonstrating yet again that life is mostly crap. (In the case of the first of these four vignettes, literally so.)

Even on the rare occasions when Solondz gives us a moment of joy, he takes care to undercut it almost at once. In the first story, doe-eyed young Remi is left alone – his parents having gone to yoga class – with his beloved new pet. The pair play ecstatically together in slow-motion, to the strains of Debussy's 'Clair de lune'. But by feeding his dog a granola bar, Remi unwittingly gives her diarrhoea. For an unbroken, inexorable 65 seconds, Solondz's camera tracks slowly along a lavish trail of brown-and-orange liquid shit – to the limp accompaniment of 'Clair de lune'...

At junctures such as these, it's tempting to wonder if Solondz isn't sending himself up. His washed-up ex-Hollywood writer turned despised college prof, played with ineradicable gloom by Danny DeVito, is called Dave Schmerz. (Middle name Welt, presumably.) Schmerz ends up revenging himself for the humiliations visited upon him by fitting his dachshund with a suicide-vest. In the fourth story, the ageing Nana (Ellen Burstyn) names her dog Cancer. ("It felt right," she explains.) Remi's father (Tracy Letts) 'walks' their pet by hauling it along on a leash screaming "Heel, motherfucker, heel!" at it, while his mother (Julie Delpy), superficially more caring, tells her son that the animal, having been put down, will be cremated, and when he asks what this means, explains "Sort of, like – put in an oven."

Only the second episode ventures something



For pet's sake: Greta Gerwig

verging on a happy ending. It plays as an unheralded sequel to Solondz's first hit, *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1995), with that film's put-upon protagonist Dawn Wiener (nicknamed Wiener-Dog by her schoolfellows) now played by Greta Gerwig. (Solondz killed her off in 2004's *Palindromes*, but no matter.) Taken by her saturnine former classmate Brandon (Kieran Culkin) to visit his two Down's-syndrome siblings, she leaves her dachshund in their delighted care. Even in this episode, though, Solondz can't resist introducing a glum mariachi trio who, asked brightly by Dawn how they like America, respond, "In America so lonely and sad and depressing. Like a big fat elephant drowning in a sea of despair."

Midway through all this joyousness, we get an intermission (flagged as such, with "Refreshments available in the lobby"), complete with a Frankie Laine-style number entitled 'The Ballad of Wiener-Dog' as a huge dachshund treks across various archetypal American landscapes. "She soldiers on," the lyrics tell us, "where angels fear to tread." One might say the same of Todd Solondz. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Martin Sundland Are Heidenström	Fund, Ghost VFX, Tre Vänner & Gimpville Produced by Fantefilm with support from Nordisk Film Distribusjon, Norwegian Film Institute, Nordisk Film og TV Fond, Swedish Film Institute Co-producers: Filmkraft Invest, Storyline Studios, Film i Väst, Piggy Bænk, Copenhagen Film Fund, Ghost VFX, Tre Vänner, Gimpville, Fuzz AS Other financiers: Georg Espe, Natasha Folker	Fridtjov Såheim Arvid Øvrebo Laila Goody Margot Valldal Arthur Berning Jacob Vikra Herman Bernhoff Georg Eli Harboe Vibeke Silje Breivik Anna Håkon Moe Thomas Tyra Holmen Teresa Thomas Bo Larsen Phillip Mette Horn Maria
Written by John Kåre Raake Harald Rosenlow Egg		Dolby Atmos In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles
Story Martin Sundland John Kåre Raake Roar Uthaug		Distributor Studiocanal Limited
Cinematographer John Christian Rosenlund		Norwegian theatrical title Bølgan
Editor Christian Siebenherz		
Production Design Lina Nordqvist	Cast Kristoffer Joner Kristian Eikjord Ane Dahl Torp Idun Karlsen Jonas Hoff Ottebro Sondre Edith Haagenrud-Sande Julia	
Original Music Magnus Bøtte		
Sound Designer Christian Schaanning		
Costume Designer Karen Fabritius Gram		
©Fantefilm Fiksjon AS		
Production Companies Fantefilm presents a co-production with Fuzz, Filmkraft Invest, Storyline Studios, Film i Väst, Piggy Bænk, Copenhagen Film		

Geiranger, Norway, present day. Kristian, a geologist whose work involves monitoring the mountainous fjords that hem in the scenic village, is preparing to move with his family to a new job in Stavanger. Just before leaving with his two children, soon to be joined by his wife Idun, he is troubled by some irregular seismic activity in the surrounding cliffs, and decides to delay his departure. His former co-workers see no cause for concern, but during the night Kristian connects the ongoing irregularities to forewarnings of previous catastrophes, and delivers his findings just as one of his friends is killed in a sudden rockslide. The avalanche sends a massive tsunami wave racing towards the village. Kristian is able to get his young daughter clear, but is himself caught up in the wave; Idun, meanwhile, is with their teenage son Sondre at the hotel where she works in town. She, Sondre and another man become trapped in the hotel's bomb shelter, which begins to fill with water. Kristian, having narrowly survived, finds that Idun and Sondre are not among the survivors who've taken refuge on higher ground above the village. He returns to the rubble of the town to find them. After Idun dispatches the third survivor, who has begun to panic violently, she makes contact with Kristian; they all escape the deluged basement and reunite as a family.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Megan Ellison Christine Vachon	Production Designer Akin McKenzie Original Music Nathan Larson James Lavino Sound Mixer Stuart Deutsch Costume Designer Amela Baksic	@Whiffle Baller LLC Production Companies Amazon Studios and Annapurna Pictures present a Killer Films production Executive Producer David Hinojosa	Cast Ellen Burstyn Nana Keaton Nigel Cooke Remi Kieran Culkin Brandon Julie Delpy Dina Danny DeVito	Schmerz Greta Gerwig Dawn Tracy Letts Danny Zosia Mamet Zoe Connor Long Tommy Bridget Brown	April Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1] Distributor Picturehouse Entertainment
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East Coast US, present day. Remi, a nine-year-old boy recovering from cancer, is given a dachshund by his father Danny; he names her Wiener-Dog. Danny and his wife Dina argue about who will look after the dog, which is kept in a cage in the garage until it's house-trained. While his parents are out, Remi brings Wiener-Dog into the house, where they play together; he feeds her a granola bar, which gives her diarrhoea. Disgusted, Danny takes the dog to the vet to be put down. The vet's assistant, Dawn Wiener, kidnaps the dog, naming her Doody. In a store she meets an old schoolmate, Brandon, and agrees to go to Ohio with him. There they meet his brother Tommy and sister April, who both have Down's syndrome. Dawn leaves Doody with them.

Intermission: 'The Ballad of Wiener Dog'

Dave Schmerz, a former Hollywood screenwriter, teaches screenwriting at a film school. He's despised by his students, who find his teaching old-fashioned and inflexible, and his agent keeps giving him the runaround. After he's publicly humiliated by a young director, an ex-student of his, he rigs his dachshund with a suicide jacket to blow up the school.

The ageing Nana is visited by her granddaughter Zoe, who brings her arrogant artist boyfriend Fantasy along. Zoe cadges money from her grandmother for Fantasy's latest project. After they've gone, Nana dreams of her multiple alternative young selves. Her dachshund, named Cancer, runs into the road and is knocked down. Six months later, Fantasy's latest opus, a dachshund in a glass box, is exhibited.

Home cinema



Out to sea: Paolo and Vittorio Taviani adapted several stories by Luigi Pirandello for their ambitious 1984 film *Kaos*

LANDSCAPE ARTISTS

A stunningly restored collection finds the Taviani brothers revelling in sound, music and the power of storytelling

THREE FILMS BY PAOLO AND VITTORIO TAVIANI

PADRE PADRONE/THE NIGHT OF THE SHOOTING STARS/KAOS

Paolo Taviani and Vittorio Taviani; Italy 1977/82/84; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 114/107/187 minutes; 1.66:1/1.66:1/1.85:1; Features: new two-hour interview with Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, video essays on individual films by film scholar Millicent Marcus, commentary on 'The Night of the Shooting Stars' by Michael Brooke, 'The Sublime Brothers', trailers for the new restorations, 100-page book featuring Pauline Kael's reviews of all three films and new translations of the Pirandello short stories adapted for 'Kaos'

Reviewed by Pasquale Iannone

Padre Padrone, a Sardinian-set true story about a young shepherd's rebellion against his tyrannical father and the seventh feature from brothers Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, is based on an autobiographical novel by linguist Gavino Ledda. It tells of the author's struggle to educate

himself after being plucked out of school and set to work at the age of six. Given that the film was made (on 16mm) for Italian state broadcaster Rai, the brothers had not expected *Padre Padrone* to make it to the 1977 Cannes film festival. So when it ended up not only in competition but actually prevailing over the likes of Wim Wenders's *The American Friend*, Theo Angelopoulos's *The Hunters*, Ettore Scola's *A Special Day* and Robert Altman's *3 Women*, they were as surprised as anyone. Much was made of Roberto Rossellini's role as jury president in the final decision. The Tavianis had been inspired to become filmmakers after viewing Rossellini's *Paisà* as teenagers three decades earlier, so it felt particularly fitting.

Some 15 years after their debut, *Padre Padrone* was to prove the Tavianis' breakthrough and it's one of three stunningly restored titles in this new collection from Arrow. Also included are *The Night of the Shooting Stars* (1982) and *Kaos* (1984): each film highlights the Tavianis' unrivalled eye for capturing the emotive charge of landscape, as well as their longstanding interest in the power of storytelling.

All three pictures revel in various forms of *mise en abyme*. *Padre Padrone*, for instance, opens with an extraordinary sequence in which the real

Gavino Ledda is shown sharpening a stick outside a school classroom before handing it over to the actor playing his father Efisio (Taviani regular Omero Antonutti, a dead ringer for British actor Julian Glover). Efisio then enters the classroom to march the six-year-old Gavino (Fabrizio Forte) away. As the film progresses, we follow the protagonist (played as a young man by Saverio Marconi) through adolescence, a failed attempt to emigrate to Germany and then on to his military service. The latter experience proves to be the turning point – an opportunity to finally break free from his father's suffocating grip. With the encouragement of fellow conscript Cesare (a young Nanni Moretti, fresh from directing his first feature, 1976's *I Am Self-Sufficient*), Gavino starts to develop an all-consuming interest in language. In one scene, he and Cesare find themselves driving tanks across a field, practising Latin with each other across the airwaves.

Padre Padrone's formal playfulness is reminiscent of the mid/late-60s films of Pier Paolo Pasolini, especially *Hawks and Sparrows* (1966). As with that film, sound and music are used in a boldly unconventional way (in one scene, we hear the inner thoughts of children in Gavino's class; in another, a goat warning that

it's about to defecate as it's being milked). In a 1979 interview with Aldo Tassone, included in Arrow's set, Paolo Taviani points out: "Sound is even more important in *Padre Padrone* than our other works because the film tells of the passage from silence to sound, to words." In a video essay included with Arrow's set, scholar of Italian film Millicent Marcus reinforces this: "Because sound is what frees Gavino from his predicament, it should come as no surprise that sound is also the Tavianis' primary means of cinematic liberation from realist codes."

Released five years later, *The Night of the Shooting Stars* is the Tavianis' most personal film. We move from the landscapes of Sardinia to those of the directors' native Tuscany. On the night of Saint Lawrence (10 August) – a night when, according to folklore, shooting stars grant wishes – a woman tells a story about events that took place on the same night many years earlier, when she was a young child. In the summer of 1944, the Allies were making their way to Tuscany from the south, while the occupying Germans and fascist sympathisers were embroiled in a series of bloody skirmishes with the partisans. *The Night of the Shooting Stars* is based loosely on events that took place in the Tavianis' hometown of San Miniato (San Martino in the film), including the bombing of a church, in which more than 50 people lost their lives.

The brothers had first explored this traumatic event in one of their earliest documentaries, *San Miniato, 1944* (1954) but, as Michael Brooke points out in his in-depth, richly informative audio commentary, it is the 1982 film that functions as a "requiem for the people of San Miniato who didn't survive the war". Given that its narrative reflects both the dislocation of war and memories of childhood, the Tavianis' use of dream sequences and various distancing devices in *The Night of Shooting Stars* is arguably even more justified than in *Padre Padrone*. The film is also notable for marking the Tavianis' first collaboration with Rome-born composer Nicola Piovani, who would go on to work on several more films with the brothers, including 1984's *Kaos*.

Kaos is the least known of the three films but the most ambitious in terms of scope and length. It was adapted from stories by Luigi Pirandello, and the book accompanying the Arrow set includes new translations by Martina Stefani of all six pieces used by the Tavianis, including the four central stories – 'The Other Son', 'Moon Sickness', 'The Jar' and 'Requiem' – together with the two stories that inspired the film's prologue ('The Crow of Mizzarò') and epilogue ('Conversations with the Characters II'). Needless to say, they make for fascinating comparison with their filmic counterparts.

After Sardinia and Tuscany, *Kaos* unfolds among the rugged landscapes of Pirandello's

Each film in the collection highlights the Tavianis' unrivalled eye for capturing the emotive charge of landscape



Growing pains: *Padre Padrone*

native Sicily. 'The Other Son' tells of Mariagrazia (Margarita Lozano), an elderly mother whose two beloved sons have emigrated to the US and haven't been in touch for over a decade. It transpires that she also has a third son, but for reasons that soon become apparent, she refuses to acknowledge him. 'Moon Sickness' is the story of Batà (Claudio Bigagli), a young married man who is terrified by the full moon, much to the exasperation of his wife Sidora (Enrica Maria Modugno). As in 'The Other Son', the reasons behind the central character's suffering are revealed to wrenchingly powerful effect.

'The Jar' is comparatively lighter in tone and features Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia, one of Italy's most popular comic double-acts. Ingrassia plays Don Lollò, a wealthy landowner who buys a large jar and positions it in pride of place in his courtyard, only to have it mysteriously damaged. He enlists the help of a mercurial old potter named Zi' Dima (Franchi) to repair it. He does so expertly, only to find himself trapped inside.

The highlight of *Kaos* – and an undoubted high point of the Tavianis' entire filmography – is the epilogue, which sees Pirandello himself (Antonutti) return to his Sicilian hometown after many years away. He arrives at his old house and has visions of his deceased mother (played by famed Neapolitan actress Regina Bianchi). With strong echoes of the storytelling of *The Night of the Shooting Stars*, she tells him of the time when she was a young girl and set off for Malta with her family to meet their exiled father. Even before the appearance of Pirandello's mother, the episode is bathed in an ineffable, dreamlike air.

As well as his audio commentary on *The Night of the Shooting Stars* and his editing of Marcus's video essays on *Padre Padrone* and *Kaos*, Brooke also presents an encyclopedic video piece of his own, exploring the themes that dominate the Tavianis' work. We also get a two-part 2015 interview with the filmmakers conducted by Richard Peña and Alessia Palanti. In the book that comes with the set, the Pirandello stories are accompanied by effusive reviews of all three pictures from US critic Pauline Kael (a long-time admirer of the Tavianis, she also sat on the 1977 Cannes jury). 

New releases

ALL NIGHT LONG

Basil Dearden; UK 1962; Network/Region B Blu-ray; 90 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: trailer, booklet, gallery

Reviewed by Neil Mitchell

Basil Dearden here uses London and its early-60s jazz scene as the setting for a syncopated Big Smoke reinterpretation of *Othello*. Starring the always intense Patrick McGeehan as Machiavellian drummer Johnny Cousin – a dope-smoking, hepcat lingo – *All Night Long* reimagines Shakespeare's Moorish general as Aurelius Rex (Paul Harris), a respected bandleader and husband of former star singer Delia Lane (Marti Stevens). Determined to start his own band and secure a recording contract by tempting Lane out of her self-imposed retirement, Cousin embarks on an underhand and potentially deadly scheme to convince Rex that his wife has been unfaithful with fellow band member Cass (Keith Michell).

Featuring performances by a number of jazz greats, including Dave Brubeck, Johnny Dankworth and Charlie Mingus, *All Night Long* was primarily a vehicle for the musicians who provide the alternately smooth and snappy soundtrack. Though the film eventually shies away from the ending of its enduring source material, the universal themes of jealousy, betrayal, love and revenge that fuel Shakespeare's tragedy are very much in evidence in Dearden's fittingly offbeat and stylish reworking.

Disc: Image gallery, trailer and booklet.

BELLADONNA OF SADNESS

Yamamoto Eiichi; Japan 1973; Cinelicious Pics/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 86 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: interviews with Yamamoto Eiichi, art director Fukai Kuni and composer Satoh Masahiko, trailers, booklet

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The capstone of the 'Animerama' series, a trilogy of erotic fables made in the animation atelier of Mushi Production by studio head Tezuka Osamu and director Yamamoto Eiichi, *Belladonna of Sadness* was recently rescued from obscurity in the West by the still-young Los Angeles-based distributor Cinelicious Pics, who gave it a remunerative run in American boutique cinemas 40-plus years on.

Unlike the previous Animerama entries *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights* (1969) and *Cleopatra: Queen of Sex* (1970), which draw from fairly well-known historical properties, *Belladonna* traces its source to *Satanism and Witchcraft*, an 1862 occult study by the historian writer Jules Michelet. It sets its scene Once Upon a Time in a France still under the yoke of the aristocracy, when chaste peasant girls must submit to the *droit de seigneur* of the local lord on the eve of their weddings. Not long after one such incident, our heroine Jeanne (voiced by Nagayama Aiko and drawn like Catherine Deneuve) begins to commune with the devil, who lends her occult powers with which she leads a revolt against the in-cahoots church and gentry, 

New releases

before finally being brought to heel by sentiment and burnt at the stake.

Belladonna of Sadness displays a dazzling plethora of styles, telling its story with images animate, still or some combination of the two – tendrils of blood, smoke and tears in an otherwise static frame, or tracking along unfurling tapestries that do the work of time-passing montages. Bravura passages that feature roiling, lovemaking silhouettes against a field of gold leaf, a *Yellow Submarine*-esque wig-out and kaleidoscopic stop-motion psychedelia stray very far from the usual tropes of anime, and the visual references here are principally western – the folklore illustrations of Ivan Bilibin, the Viennese Secession, Benjamin Christensen's *Håxan* (1922).

I was conscious of being impressed by the film's myriad techniques, occasionally titillated by the dirty pictures, but never exactly moved by the relentless virtuosity – though I suspect it benefits to be stoned as a bat before popping in the Blu-ray, for *Belladonna* has all of the gonzo extravagancies that make for a cult rediscovery. (See: *Hausu*; Jodorowsky, Alejandro).

Disc: A sweet little package, though it's unclear what the back-cover copy means when it says "If Led Zeppelin had a favourite film, this would be it." Like, all of them?

CRIMES OF PASSION

Ken Russell; USA 1984; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 107/112 minutes; Certificate 18; 1.85:1; Features: commentary by Barry Sandler and Ken Russell, interviews with Barry Sandler and Rick Wakeman, deleted scenes, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by David Thompson

After making *Valentino* (1977, recently issued on Blu-ray by the BFI), Ken Russell finally went the way of all ambitious British directors to Hollywood, but his first film there, *Altered States* (1980), found him at loggerheads with the much lauded screenwriter Paddy Chayefsky. Russell's fiery reputation didn't help his career there until he chanced upon Barry Sandler's script *Crimes of Passion*, which in its themes of erotic game-playing and emotional redemption appealed strongly to the lapsed-Catholic fantasist.

An established screenwriter, Sandler had just made his mark with the first mainstream studio movie to focus on a gay couple, *Making Love* (1982). A fan of Russell's work, Sandler became producer on *Crimes of Passion* to ensure that any rewriting was his responsibility, and the two enjoyed a harmonious relationship (evidenced by their joint commentary track on this disc – at least until Russell mysteriously departs halfway through to catch a plane).

Kathleen Turner – then a 'hot' actress thanks to *Body Heat* and *Romancing the Stone* – took quite a gamble playing the film's demanding lead role as Joanna Crane, a cold, distant fashion designer by day and a hooker with many guises at night (she might be called 'Belle de nuit').

Joanna, aka China Blue, becomes the subject of a fraud investigation by a frustrated family man (John Laughlin) while being stalked by a sex-obsessed preacher called Shayne, played in full psychotic flight by Anthony Perkins. Perkins, in life an ordained priest of a kind, apparently lived the role to the point of never changing

his rancid clothes during the shoot, creating his own pornographic shrine to China Blue and sniffing genuine amyl nitrate on camera.

While Sandler saw the film, which overflows with his witty and perverse dialogue, as a "plea for honesty" in relationships and a commentary on the fag end of the sexual revolution (Aids was just about to hit hard), Russell was more fascinated by the personas we adopt in order not to show weakness. Either way, it all veers constantly between high camp and psychological onslaught, resulting in one of Russell's most successful movies. Dick Bush, his former cameraman at the BBC, shoots with a garish colour palette where suited, and Rick Wakeman's rock mash-up of Dvorak's New World Symphony helps to provide a satirical edge to a hellish portrait of Los Angeles.

At the time, *Crimes of Passion* was considered sexually daring, in particular for a scene in which China Blue plays torturer to an arrogant cop, using his baton for some vigorous anal thrusting. Cuts had to be made for the US release and in Britain; this release gives us both an 'unrated version' and a slightly longer 'director's cut', though the latter's extra minutes are in fact mainly dialogue scenes.

Disc: Fine transfers of both cuts. The main extras are imported from a previous Anchor Bay release on US DVD (2002), but the interviews (Rick Wakeman on very droll form) are new.

EDVARD MUNCH

Peter Watkins; Norway 1974; Eureka/Region B Blu-ray; 221 minutes; Certificate PG; 1.37:1; Features: 80-page booklet

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Peter Watkins has described *Edvard Munch* as the most personal film he has ever made; and surely one factor in its individuality and attraction is the intensity of his identification with his subject. Among other things, both men were exiles from their homelands – Munch left Norway in the late 1880s to work in Paris and Berlin, propelled by the rejection of the Norwegian artistic establishment and his own father. When Watkins conceived the film, as a miniseries for Norwegian television, he was at the beginning of a long exile from Britain – his response to the BBC's cowardly handling of *The War Game*, his devastating 1965 film about the effects of nuclear war, and critical disdain for his first feature, the satire *Privilege* (1966).

Watkins himself narrates in English, while his amateur cast speak Norwegian. As in *The*

War Game and the earlier *Culloden*, actors sometimes speak to camera as though to an interviewer; but more striking here is the way that when not speaking they will often gaze directly at the camera – imploringly, accusingly, more often simply registering the camera's presence as another observer. In particular, Geir Westerby, who plays Munch, looking like a leaner, more melancholy DiCaprio, often seems to catch the viewer's eye, creating an odd illusion of intimacy or complicity: "You see?"

Throughout, the narrative present is intercut with flashbacks, bringing together recurrent images of illness (the death of Munch's mother, of a younger sister) and sex (his affair with a married woman); the effect is of consciousness constantly inflected by memory and imagination, creating a novelistic density. Munch's family circumstances and artistic ambitions, the pseudo-philosophical rows of his circle, are interrupted by miserable details of working-class life in late-19th-century Kristiania, where a third of the workforce were children, and prostitution was legalised for the convenience of the bourgeoisie: Watkins's insistence on putting art in the context of hard economic facts makes some supposedly Marxist art historians look wishy-washy.

Although the period detail is meticulous, the film feels less like a historical drama than a kind of science fiction, a dystopia. It is unlike other artistic biopics, too, in its passionate concern for the paintings – why they were painted and what they might mean. It may not, perhaps, persuade you of Munch's importance; but the case for its own significance as an autonomous work of art is indisputable.

Disc: No extras. The Blu-ray reveals the painterly beauty of Odd Geir Sæther's cinematography, in which Munch's world seems to be steeped in a soft, natural light.

FILMS BY RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER

EFFI BRIEST

West Germany 1974; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate U; 140 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: commentary by Ken Moulden, interviews with Ulli Lommel and Jürgen Jürges

FOX AND HIS FRIENDS & CHINESE ROULETTE

West Germany/West Germany & France 1975/76; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 12/86 minutes; 1.37:1/1.85:1; Features: 'Fox and His Friends' commentary by Hamish Ford, interview with Ulli Lommel ('Chinese Roulette')

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Having overseen an extensive programme of DVD transfers, the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation continues to take expert care of the great man's filmography, with a fresh round of 4k transfers bringing the material to Blu-ray. If these mid-period RWF titles are anything to go by, this represents an enticing prospect for loyal admirers and newcomers alike, especially since the format's expanded storage space can also fit a double-bill on a single disc.

This allows, for instance, a fascinating comparison in the coupling of 1975's *Fox and His Friends* with the following year's *Chinese Roulette*, since the former's somewhat stylised tale of a rough-hewn fairground worker ruthlessly exploited by his posh new pals and lovers after a lottery win still has one foot in social-



Night moves: *Crimes of Passion*

ANOTHER COUNTRY

Despite their seemingly idyllic settings, two films reveal the hardships and harsh realities of rural life in old England

AKENFIELD

Peter Hall; UK 1974; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 98 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: featurettes, cast and crew interviews, booklet

ON THE BLACK HILL

Andrew Grieve; UK 1988; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 116 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: introduction by Andrew Grieve, featurettes

Reviewed by Graham Fuller

Old churches and mildewy gravestones, strategically positioned five-bar gates, amorous women wearing straw hats, sun-dappled woods and lanes, New Jerusalem-ish musical themes and memories of Great War soldiering are common to Peter Hall's *Akenfield* (1974), Andrew Grieve's *On the Black Hill* (1987) and Pat O'Connor's *A Month in the Country* (1987). One can imagine undiscerning Brexit supporters seizing on these movies, which were released on home video this summer as part of the BFI's 'Britain on Film: Rural Life' project, to validate the monocultural 'good' old days, as if they were late-20th-century counterparts to rurally based wartime propaganda classics such as *Went the Day Well?*, *A Canterbury Tale* and *Tawny Pipit*.

The Brexiter would be misguided in the attempt. Though *Akenfield* and *On the Black Hill* depict different degrees of rustic communality (and the latter a ruinous feud between neighbouring Welsh Border farmers), they are steeped in the literary tradition of John Clare and Thomas Hardy, who sorrowfully – if more ambiguously in Hardy's case – chronicled the decline of feudal traditions that benefited the 19th-century peasant class. Reaching from 1900 to modern times, both films debunk the myth that the rhythms of the English countryside (Anglo-Welsh in the case of Grieve's) are timeless. Struggle and change are the constants.

Each film reveals how rural folk have been grist for the mill of capitalism (inherent to agriculture as much as urban industrialism) and imperialism, as embodied in the recruitment of farm boys for the war. *On the Black Hill* was adapted by Grieve from Bruce Chatwin's densely lyrical 1982 novel about co-dependent twin brothers with different sexual orientations and a shared soul, buffeted by 80 years of social upheaval and environmental attrition. The brutal treatment meted out at Hereford Barracks in 1918 to one of the brothers, the pacifist Benjamin (Mike Gwilym), echoed that of the socialist conscientious objector Philip Hargreaves in Ken Loach's *Days of Hope* (1975). Repudiated by his wife Mary (Gemma Jones) for allowing Benjamin rather than his stronger twin Lewis (Robert Gwilym) to be conscripted, the boys' father, tenant farmer



Visions of the daughters of Albion: Peter Hall's *Akenfield*

Amos (Bob Peck), is subsequently destroyed by bidding beyond his means to keep his holding when the English gentry break up and auction the landed estate to which it belongs. Refusing idealisation, *On the Black Hill* owes its greyness to cinematographer Thaddeus O'Sullivan's use of the bleach-bypass process; *Padre Padrone*, *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*, and *Christ Stopped at Eboli* were among its immediate spiritual precursors.

Hall's film is a critique of the industrialisation of farming under a celebration of village manners and rituals. The revered source, Ronald Blythe's *Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village*, an oral history book combining testimony from several Suffolk villages, honours the intricate, pre-scientific skills of the ploughman, the smithy and the thatcher without sentimentalising the harsh existence of their class. Hall, who fled Suffolk as a young man and claimed in his production diary that he continued to fear it, persuaded Blythe, who has lived most of his 93 years there, to write a synopsis for a Bressonian film to be improvised by non-actors. Blythe's 18-page treatment juxtaposed the failed attempt of Gallipoli survivor Tom Rouse to escape his Suffolk birthplace – *Akenfield* offers him a bleak future as a tithed farmworker – with the attempt of his thirtyish grandson, who faces the same plight more than 50 years later, to leave the village on the day of the old man's funeral. Garrow Shand, a 23-year-old agricultural contractor in 1974, plays three Rouses: the uncertain modern Tom – whose plan to emigrate to Australia upsets his mother Dulcie and girlfriend Jean – and, fleetingly, his grandfather and father, whom poverty had prevented from attending grammar school and who was killed in World War II having married the pregnant Dulcie

in a hurry. The reminiscences of old Tom (voiced by Peter Tuddenham) and his garrulous sister harp on his John Clare-like odyssey to and from Newmarket, 40 miles away, to seek work there, in vain, at the behest of his frustrated wife Charlotte.

Spanning a similar period and drawing on the memories of an elderly graveyard groundsman (Vic Smith) – a onetime Edwardian bridegroom who's ended up on a Wimpey estate – David Gladwell's magical realist *Requiem for a Village* (1976; BFI DVD/Blu-ray, 2011), which was inspired by Stanley Spencer's resurrection paintings and George Ewart Evans's writings, also weaves past and present. It more caustically denunciates the ravages of modernity than *Akenfield*, though its use of sexual violation as a metaphor for despoliation of the land – a farmgirl is raped by hay-scythers at a long-ago harvest, a biker girl enjoys public sex with Hells Angels – is problematic.

Both *On the Black Hill* and *Akenfield* augur domestic strife via the trampling of bird's eggs (realising a constant fear expressed by the poet Clare): educated bourgeois Mary steps on a lark's nest when she is courted by the rough, Lawrentian yeoman Amos; Edwardian Tom steps on a nest after having sex with housemaid Charlotte in the bushes beyond the garden of the vicarage where she works. Both films are redolent of T.S. Eliot's 'East Coker' in delineating cycles of renewal and decay and asserting that science is not progressive – jet planes, harvesters and tractors are loaded with threat – and both are infused with partially referred Proustianism (the 80-year-old twins recall their childhood and perhaps imagine their parents' first year together, just as young Tom imagines old Tom's life).

Our private connections to such stories resonate: my paternal grandfather was a Sussex thatcher, ploughman and harvester driver who worked himself to death; my father apprenticed with a wheelwright, like the old craftsmen in *A Canterbury Tale* and *Requiem for a Village*, before he broke away like young Tom Rouse. 📺

Both films debunk the myth that the rhythms of the English countryside are timeless. Change and struggle are the constants

Revival

SHORT AND SWEET

The roots of Buster Keaton's comic style can be traced to a series of surprisingly sophisticated two-reelers made with Roscoe Arbuckle

BUSTER KEATON: THE COMPLETE SHORT FILMS

Buster Keaton; USA 1917-23; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; 720 minutes; 1.33:1; Certificate PG; Features: newly discovered version of 'The Blacksmith' with four minutes of previously unseen footage, alternate endings for 'Coney Island' and 'My Wife's Relations'; 'That's Some Buster'; video essay by David Cairns, introduction by Serge Bromberg; 'The Art of Buster Keaton'; Pierre Etaix on Keaton's style, audio recording of Keaton at a party in 1962; 'Life with Buster Keaton' (1951, excerpt); 184-page booklet containing a roundtable discussion, new essays and archival imagery

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

For three years, from 1920 to 1923, Buster Keaton raced through an unparalleled creative streak. The two-reel comedies he made during this period were relentlessly inventive, often astonishing in their cinematic sophistication, and consistently hilarious. The austerity of the 'Great Stone Face' persona crashlanded into an unforgiving world of mortality and cruelty as well as physical improbability, creating short films that were already distinctively Keaton-esque, and artfully timeless.

Beginning with the steampunk romance of *One Week* (1920) and the slapstick savagery of *The High Sign* (1921), Keaton's comic roll careered through highlights including the grandly orchestrated chases of *Cops* (1922) and the visual delirium of *The Playhouse* (1921), deviating slapstick comedy into burlesque elegance in *The Boat* (1921) or meticulously planned mayhem in *The Goat* (1921). In 1923, as this remarkable run came to an end, Keaton pivoted to feature films, first with *Three Ages* (1923) and *Our Hospitality* (1923) and then with the high-water mark of *Sherlock Jr* (1924), a feat of sustained high-energy proto-surrealism. A new Masters of Cinema Blu-ray box-set traces the path Keaton beat to get there. In one joyful place it collects all of his short films, plus their immediate forebears, the two-reelers he made with Roscoe Arbuckle.

Keaton first appeared on screen with Arbuckle, who would become a lifelong friend, in his film *The Butcher Boy* (1917), partnering the star in some neat visual gags. They went on to make many films together, with Keaton rapidly coming to the fore of Arbuckle's troupe. As second fiddle to Arbuckle, Keaton had yet to acquire his icy persona, which emphasised each gag by playing it down – in *Coney Island* (1917) he even laughs out loud – and the slapstick is mostly far less refined than his later work, in which each apparently fluid movement is really a series of immaculate poses. It would be near impossible for anyone to steal the show from Arbuckle's uncanny, almond-eyed clown, dainty in posture and mighty in bulk, anyway. But in the later shorts you can see Keaton

assuming a new confidence, beginning with his deadpan gag routine in a frontier saloon in *Out West* (1918), the first of their collaborations to be made in California rather than New York. In *Good Night Nurse* (1918) he even has the brass neck to return the flirtatious finger-sucking campy of a dragged-up Arbuckle and ramp it up.

However, it's a joy once Keaton takes the lead, with his own productions. Keaton always liked to make his audience guess where a gag might go next, then confound expectations. In practice, this 'double-crossing' means that the jokes escalate and diverge into something beyond humour, a poetry of the visual world. Keaton's vaudeville background, the years spent perfecting the timing and blocking of stunts, is combined with his mechanical mind to create elaborate set pieces. Then, while the staging is often as flat as his pork-pie hat, Keaton's imagination sets those ideas loose among nightmare landscapes, cinema snoozes and fictions-within-fictions. The mood is often bleak, as in the tombstone ending of *Cops* or failed suicides of *Hard Luck* (1921), but Keatonland is surprisingly elastic, encompassing all parallel realities, for example offering a condemned man a rubber noose in *Convict 13* (1920) – a sick joke, if a kind one.

This is not, as it might at first appear, a straightforward Blu-ray rerelease of the

Keaton always liked to make his audience guess where a gag might go next, then confound expectations

company's earlier *Buster Keaton: The Complete Short Films 1917-1923*. The films have been newly restored and prepped for high-definition presentation. Where the right source material exists, the films look crisp and fresh.

The extra features on the previous box-set have been augmented with new material, including a recently unearthed alternative version of *The Blacksmith* (1922) and the cut ending (removed because, to be blunt, it is a cheap racist gag) from the Arbuckle film *Coney Island*. There are accomplished musical scores for each short, occasionally a choice of two, by a range of leading silent film accompanists. One thing has been misplaced, if not entirely lost, in the transition to Blu-ray: film historian Joseph McBride's informative audio commentaries for six of the most acclaimed shorts, delivered in an appropriately cool drawl, sadly could not be synchronised with the new restorations. They, together with the DVD versions of those films, are included alongside as a bonus.

The chunky booklet from the previous box is still present, including an in-depth roundtable discussion by Brad Stevens, Dan Sallitt and Jean-Pierre Coursodon and lots of archive text. There are also new notes and an essay by Jeffrey Vance, and a piece by Serge Bromberg on recent Keaton finds, including that parallel *Blacksmith*. On the discs themselves lurk an introduction by Bromberg, the thoughts of French actor-director Pierre Etaix on Keaton, an audio clip of Keaton at a party in 1962, and 1951 footage of him performing Arbuckle's 'Salomé dance', plus a thoughtful video-essay tribute by critic and filmmaker David Cairns. 



Rolling Stoneface: Buster Keaton

New releases

 realist narrative, while the latter's portrayal of a toxic family gathering goes all-out to frame a posed and preening tableau expressing all of Fassbinder's bilious feelings towards the hetero institution of marriage. True, the latter provides more in the way of sheer scalding attitude than actual dramatic substance, but the conviction with which the circling camera traps these exemplars of the nation's economic miracle in a cage formed from their own self-serving worthlessness is still something to see.

Curiously, though, *Fox and His Friends*, while ostensibly a groundbreaking drama capturing the gay milieu of 1970s Munich, thematically has more in common with *Effi Briest*, Fassbinder's magisterial foray into 19th-century literary adaptation. Both provide bleak cautionary tales about the perils of cultural aspiration, where protagonists dreaming of social mobility find their fortunes crushed by the machinations of those several rungs higher on the ladder. Fassbinder's own performance as the doomed Fox works up an element of emotional empathy for this earthy underdog, yet the steely precision of his direction in *Effi Briest* determinedly drains the material of melodrama – just as the austere black-and-white images resist traditional costume-drama spectacle – in favour of a cumulatively mesmerising analysis of controlling cruelty and shameless hypocrisy. It's all so buttoned-down, it's not exactly typical Fassbinder, yet he's near his best here, and anyone in tune with, say, *The Age of Innocence* or *The House of Mirth* will find ample rewards.

Disc: Already available in barebones form on DVD, all three titles benefit from a Blu-ray upgrade, and now come with valuable commentaries too. The transfer of *Effi Briest* here extracts even more detail from the black-and-white camerawork, while German-studies academic Ken Moulden regales us with a wealth of historical context. Furthermore, the double-bill on the other disc now provides a much more film-like, integrated rendition of both pictures' colour schemes, and Angus Ford's thorough survey of *Fox and His Friends* explores its uneasy reception in the gay community.

THE IN-LAWS

Arthur Hiller; USA 1979; Criterion UK/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 103 minutes; 1.85:1. Features: commentary by Alan Arkin, Andrew Bergman, Peter Falk and Arthur Hiller, Alan Arkin interview, supporting cast recollections, trailer

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

It didn't make much of a splash on its initial release, but time and cumulative word of mouth have propelled this odd-couple comedy to classic status, now underlined by its ascension to the Criterion pantheon. Being funny, you'd imagine, is a basic requirement of comic material, but Andrew Bergman's inspired creation goes much further than being mildly amusing while you're watching it – no, this is funny on the level of giggling to yourself in the street ten years later, or breaking up at the very suggestion of the word 'serpentine'.

Actually, what we learn from the worthwhile extras is that the whole thing was Alan Arkin's idea, since he reckoned he'd have onscreen chemistry with Peter Falk and suggested *Blazing*



With friends like these: *Fox and His Friends*

Saddles co-writer Bergman come up with a script – the main instruction being that Falk should basically drive the Arkin character nuts. Thus we arrive at the straitlaced Fifth Avenue dentist and the covert CIA agent united by their children's forthcoming wedding – if they survive an escalating maelstrom of bullets and international intrigue to make it that far.

Arkin calibrates every step from mild anxiety to paralysing fear and thence a certain liberated delirium, while Falk remains jovially unflappable in the face of life-threatening peril. Director Hiller, no critical darling, does an impeccable job of framing the stars' cherishable interaction while playing the domestic asides and espionage context absolutely straight, so when Bergman does fling in some out-of-nowhere madcap guest spots – private-jet travel, for instance, will never be the same again – they absolutely sing.

Overall, it's a comedy masterclass, but at the same time the film's winging-it lunacy essentially defies analysis. We're just laughing too hard to deconstruct the damn thing.

Disc: A solid 2k Blu-ray transfer allows the movie to make the best possible case for itself in acquiring a whole new fan club, while the commentary (recorded in 2003) finds the quartet of major players justifiably marvelling at a once-in-a-career experience for all concerned.

A KIND OF LOVING

John Schlesinger; UK 1962; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 117 minutes; 1.66:1. Features: short film ('Terminus'), featurette ('A Kind of Loving and the British New Wave'), John Schlesinger NFT interview, Stuart Maconie appreciation

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

John Schlesinger's feature debut came comparatively late in the angry-young-men/kitchen-sink cycle, but it wears its 54 years rather better than many of its contemporaries, not least because some of its social concerns are just as pervasive today – in particular the impossibility of obtaining decent housing even when both halves of a married couple are in steady employment.

The couple in question are Vic Brown (Alan Bates) and Ingrid Rothwell (June Ritchie), not an ideal match on any level other than the basest, but forced to marry after she shyly confesses, in what by 1962 standards was extreme sexual explicitness, that "Something that should have happened hasn't: it's been 15 days." When they are forced – by penury and Ingrid's unrealistic domestic ambitions – to

move into her mother's fussily maintained semi, it's clear from the moment that Thora Hird first wrinkles her nose at her new son-in-law that things aren't going to go well.

But if the narrative runs along decidedly familiar lines, former (and then very recent) documentarist Schlesinger gives the film immense lasting value in its pitch-perfect presentation of the fine detail of northern working-class life – the football, the pubs, the brass-band concerts, the 'mucky books', the works dos with their fake bonhomie, and above all the finely calibrated snobbery. Despite having a skilled job himself, Vic is happy to chat to the window cleaner as an equal, but the latter is then dressed down by Mrs Rothwell, who firmly believes that certain people should know their place. Hird is magnificent in a part that could easily have slipped into crude caricature, and Bates is even better. As with his New Wave predecessors Jimmy Porter and Arthur Seaton, Vic's own character flaws could hardly be more obvious, yet his lonely nocturnal sojourn in the railway station is so laceratingly soul-baring that it would melt even the flintiest heart.

Disc: Sourced from the BFI's recent restoration, the film has scrubbed up beautifully in high definition, the picture now sharp enough to make out the brand names (many now nostalgically obsolete) on the kiosk shelves. A good selection of extras spans the archival (Schlesinger's seminal British Transport Films short *Terminus*, sadly only in standard definition; on-topic extracts from a very hissy 1988 audio interview, illustrated with stills) and the purpose-shot. The latter includes the personal (Stuart Maconie's appreciation) and the historical/analytical (a context-setting featurette presented by historians John Hill and Melanie Williams).

99 RIVER STREET

Phil Karlson; USA 1953; Kino Lorber/Region A Blu-ray; 83 minutes; 1.37:1. Features: audio commentary by Eddie Muller

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Rarely remembered even amid Karlson's rat-pit oeuvre, this hostile, complicated *noir* paints a vivid portrait of a postwar America, where the heyday of homefront optimism has given way to betrayal and greedy carnage. Karlson's *noir* isn't the world of post-expressionist shadows and suggested doom, but more like punch-drunk documentaries about social collapse.

Here, John Payne, in probably his nastiest role, plays a has-been boxer now driving a New York cab, much to the bilious chagrin of his ex-showgirl wife, played with selfish venom by Peggy Castle. Nearing boiling point when he finds out she's cheating on him with a snake (the disconcertingly slimy Brad Dexter), who we know is a homicidal jewel thief, Payne's mug gets suckered by a flighty, narcissistic actress (the fluttery Evelyn Keyes) into helping her dispose of the body of a Broadway producer's she killed in self-defence.

That is, until it's revealed that the whole thing was a ruse (the theatre's investors wanted to prove the actress's chops), at which point Payne socks every single one of them, nearly kills Keyes and then finds his wife's body in his cab's backseat, strangled



Television

TIMESLIP

UK 1970-71; ATV/Network/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 644 minutes; 1.33:1. Features: documentary 'Behind the Barrier', mini-episode 'Beyond the Barrier', featurette 'Back to the Barrier', 2007 Convention footage, PDF archive of scripts and production paperwork, image gallery of 'Timeslip' comic strip, booklet

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Fans of British sci-fi television are used to encountering a gulf between imaginative ambition and resources – sometimes it looks as though the gulf might be the thing they're attracted to. In the case of *Timeslip*, the gulf gapes wider than usual. The storyline of the first six episodes ('The Wrong End of Time'), in which young Simon and Liz (Spencer Banks and Cheryl Burfield) slip through a 'time barrier' to travel back 30 years and help frustrate a Nazi raid, is more or less conventional: it sits in a tradition of time-travel in English fiction that also includes *Tom's Midnight Garden* and *Moondial*, and has hints of *Narnia* – the initially swotty, staid Simon ("There's a good double-feature on at the Classic – one by Renoir and another by Jean-Luc Godard") and brave, open-hearted Liz are ringers for Eustace Scrubb and Lucy Pevensie in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

But over the next 18 episodes, it becomes progressively stranger and wilder, as the time barrier transports the children into alternative futures – an Antarctic experimental station ('The Time of the Ice Box'), a tropical Buckinghamshire ('The Year of the Burn Up') – before taking them backwards to 1965 to discover the complex plot that lies behind their adventures ('The Day of the Clone'). As well as clones (still a novel concept in 1970), they encounter longevity drugs, enhanced intelligence and environmental catastrophe, and large parts of the plot hang on telepathy. The viewer is introduced to peculiar notions of the relationship between time and consciousness – in a preface to the first episode, Peter Fairley, ITN science correspondent, makes noises about the latest research, but the inspiration is evidently J.W. Dunne's 1927 book *An Experiment with Time*, which also underlay J.B. Priestley's 'Time Plays' – *Dangerous Corner*, *I Have Been Here Before*, etc.

This was extraordinary stuff to be offering children at teatime (and would be even more remarkable today, when serious children's drama is so thin on the ground). The stories seethe with technological and environmental anxieties, with questions about what it is to be human; and in Liz's meetings with radically different future versions of herself – a chilly scientist and a warm, sexy rainforest dweller – it suggests a powerful faith in our ability to choose what sort of person we become. Scientifically it is terribly muddled, but the confusion only adds to a sense of intellectual intoxication.

The execution falls a long way short of the conception, though: the dialogue is often awkward, the plotting confused and the acting uneven – though Banks (who three years later would star in David Rudkin and Alan Clarke's *Penda's Fen*) matures through the series; and Dennis Quilley is superb as the scheming, ambiguous Commander Traynor. But perhaps you are happy to be swallowed by the gulf.

Disc: The discs are copied from not especially



Timeslip This was extraordinary stuff to be offering children at teatime. The stories seethe with technological and environmental anxieties

good black-and-white film – only episode six of 'The Age of the Ice Box' survives in colour to give us a frustrating glimpse of the shiny future we should be watching. The extras are generous, though mostly of interest to the *Timeslip* fan community. The significant new addition to this release is the brief fan film *Timeslip: Beyond the Barrier*, a ten-minute sequel with a nicely open ending in which the real, middle-aged Banks and Burfield sportingly reprise their roles.

THE GINGER TREE

Anthony Garner/ Matsumoto Morimasa; UK 1989; BBC/ Simply Media/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 240 minutes; 4:3

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

This was intended to be the BBC's version of *The Jewel in the Crown* – a sweeping historical saga with romance, war and exotic settings, based on a novel by Oswald Wynd about a young Scotswoman who, early in the 20th century, becomes the concubine of a Japanese general. That didn't work out: critical reception was muted, and though viewing figures were respectable – particularly given the quantities of subtitled dialogue – it was not the hoped-for global hit. Production was evidently fraught: Christopher Hampton, in an introduction to the published version of the script, gives a tactful but entertaining account of the culture clash between the BBC and Japanese production partner NHK. Ross Devenish (who had directed the superb BBC *Bleak House* with Denholm Elliott and Diana Rigg) had to be replaced at short notice. The drama that emerged is at times fidget-makingly languorous, at times puzzlingly abrupt; and the drawing of the stuffy British and

inscrutable orientals lacks depth. But the acting is generally excellent and Samantha Bond, in her first starring role, is outstanding, hinting gently at passion and resolve beneath a demure exterior.

Disc: At NHK's insistence, and to the BBC's dismay, this became the first British series shot in high-definition digital (long before any UK televisions had the capacity to show HD). DVD does not do it justice – it would be good to see a proper HD transfer – but even so the Chinese and Japanese locations take on a gorgeous pictorial quality.

ROOBARB AND CUSTARD

Bob Godfrey/Jason Tammemägi; UK 1974/2005; BBC/Channel 5/Simply Media/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 345 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

This is the first collection to unite Bob Godfrey's original scruffy, wobbly, acid-toned *Roobarb* with the Channel 5 reboot 30 years on (*Roobarb and Custard Too*). I don't think it is purely nostalgia that makes me prefer Godfrey's version: the sheer brevity of his 30 episodes licenses a throwaway attitude to narrative logic that sits well with the marker-pen animation. The longer rebooted episodes, with their larger cast of characters, feel more conventional; and the digital animation is too clean, the outlines wobbling too regularly to be convincing. Still, the new version is a very creditable imitation, and since both series are voiced by Richard Briers and written by Grange Calveley (whose status as creator is bigged up second time around), they will probably prove equally satisfactory for child-minding purposes.

Disc: Oh, it's fine. ☺

New releases

and planted by Dexter's lowlife. There's more – the screenplay (worked on by four writers, including Karlson and Payne, who collaborated to the same depth on 1952's *Kansas City Confidential* and 1955's *Hell Island*) is crafty as hell, with every character (except Payne's) keeping secrets and hidden motivations. A thick web of grungy and believable supporting characters keeps things grown-up, notably Jay Adler as a menacing diamond fence, Eddy Waller as a fight trainer, Frank Faylen as a weathered taxi dispatcher, Paul Bryar as a cagey bartender and so on, giving the film a zesty New York-ness that belies its entirely studio-shot locations. Too well known as a sweet leading man, Payne's turn as a bleary punk is almost upsetting, while Keyes is mysteriously spot-on underplaying a preening overactor. Karlson, as always, keeps things terse, tense, and sentiment-free.

Another restored staple for the genre canon, seething with mistrust over an America where the proles who fought WWII struggle in rotten jobs while thieves lurk in the backrooms, twisting the system and getting rich.

Disc: Fine archival print and transfer, with author and Film Noir Foundation head Eddie Muller sprinkling in ardour for his commentary.

PLAY ON! SHAKESPEARE IN SILENT FILM

UK 2016; BFI National Archive/Region-free Blu-ray and DVD
Dual Format; Certificate U; 63 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: ten complete short films with optional commentary, featurettes about the compilation and music, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Less immediately scholarly than the BFI's previous DVD release *Silent Shakespeare* (which, in a gratifyingly generous gesture, is also included in this package in its entirety), *Play On!* is a delightfully multifaceted clip-fest, in which extracts from 25 Shakespeare films made between 1899 (Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree's *King John*) and 1940 (the travelogue *Shakespeare Country*) in the UK, US, France, Germany and Italy have been sympathetically grouped into a five-act structure revolving around the themes of Artifice, Spectacle, Dramatis Personae, Performance and Favourite Scenes. Onscreen text (Shakespearean or otherwise) is kept to a minimum, with the images and music (by the Globe theatre's in-house composers Alex Baranowski, Sophie Cotton, Olly Fox, Jules Maxwell and Stephen Warbeck) doing the bulk of the talking, and discreet captions identifying individual films.

Thankfully the 'greatest hits' strategy beguiles from the off, and is also extremely faithful to the approach of most of the original films. Even in full, the pre-1913 films were extremely truncated, tending to revolve around the more instantly recognisable set pieces. Longer and even feature-length films are also drawn upon – *Hamlets* starring Johnston Forbes-Robertson (1913) and a cross-dressing Asta Nielsen (1920), *Othello* with Emil Jannings (1922) – but their big dramatic highlights integrate well. Frankly, some of these films work better as short extracts: the full-length 1913 *Hamlet* is a bit of a slog at its full 53-minutes (not included here), but much more digestible in this form. Considerable historical interest comes from both the performance styles



This charming man: *The Private Affairs of Bel Ami*

(many actors started in 19th-century theatre) and the differing ways of translating Shakespeare into an entirely visual medium, with Percy Stow's tableau-based *The Tempest* showcasing a viably cinematic approach as early as 1908.

Disc: Allowances have to be made for the extreme age of the source materials, but many are in remarkably good condition and it's safe to say that this high-definition presentation is about as good as most of them are ever realistically likely to get. The music was recorded a century later and is crystal clear.

Bountiful extras include two context-setting featurettes (one about the music) and ten complete (or complete surviving) silent Shakespeare shorts: *King Lear* (1910), *The Winter's Tale* (1913), *Living Paintings* (aka *Romeo and Juliet*, 1924) and all seven shorts from the BFI's previous *Silent Shakespeare* DVD. All short-film extras come with optional commentaries by Professor Judith Buchanan, and the booklet includes write-ups of all the source films.

THE PRIVATE AFFAIRS OF BEL AMI

Albert Lewin; USA 1946; Olive Films/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 112 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: optional English subtitles

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Insouciance, high-handedness, a complete lack of fucks given – whatever you want to call it, this is the particular screen presence of George Sanders. His rakish aloofness is put to fine use playing the *homme fatale* of *The Private Affairs of Bel Ami*, an adaptation of an 1885 novel by Guy de Maupassant, directed by Albert Lewin, for whom Sanders had played the wicked Lord Henry in the 1945 MGM production of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

In *Bel Ami*, a gelid Sanders is once again spraying epigrams in his wake ("I disapprove of hypocrisy in other people"), and Lewin repeats his big painting reveal – here, instead of an Ivan Albright grotesquerie it's Max Ernst's *The Temptation of St Anthony*, shown in colour in an otherwise black-and-white film as is done in both *Dorian Gray* and Sanders-Lewin's 1942 *The Moon and Sixpence*. (Salvador Dalí's canvas of the same name was a failed contestant in a ballyhooed search to find a painting for use in the movie.) Lewin was a Europhile Harvard boy and a former critic, and his command of references to literature and painting made him seem eminently cultured in a Hollywood at the height of its barbaric splendour – and would earn him the distrust of auteur critics to whom

anything 'literary' smelled funny. *Bel Ami*, like its follow-up, *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* (1951), boasts an immersive artifice, here courtesy of production designer Gordon Wiles, and before a Production Code-designated tut-tut at the close it is strikingly straightforward in matters of sexual abjection, as boulevardier gigolo Sanders screws his way to the top in Gay Paree. His conquests include an equally unflappable Ann Dvorak, grovelling masochist Angela Lansbury and Katherine Emery, rather plain until she stands suddenly white-haired and radiant, an avenging angel, over the duelling ground where cocksman Bel Ami's reign of terror comes to a close.

Disc: The UCLA archives restoration has produced a textured treatment of Russell Metty's cinematography, usually employed in master shots or ripples of scandalised close-up reaction.

RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD

Dan O'Bannon; USA 1985; Scream Factory/

Region 1/A Blu-ray; 91 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: commentary tracks, featurettes, theatrical trailers, TV spots, zombie subtitles, workprint

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

In the current climate of hear-no-dissent, feedback-loop political discourse, the poor old zombie has been in heavy rotation as an easily adaptable stand-in for whatever braindead/brainwashed Other the viewer prefers. What a relief, then, to revisit Dan O'Bannon's stupid-smart *Return of the Living Dead*, in which the zombies actually walk around hollering "BRAINS!", and act as metaphors for absolutely nothing.

O'Bannon was an old hand in genre hijinkery, collaborating with John Carpenter on *Dark Star* back when they were students at the University of Southern California and, to hear him tell it, getting screwed out of proper credit for that and almost everything he was involved in afterwards, up to his death in 2009. *Return of the Living Dead*, at least, O'Bannon was able to see to conclusion, teaming with John A. Russo, co-screenwriter of George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*. Coming up against *Day of the Dead* in 1985, these also-ran all-stars didn't try to beat Romero at his own game, instead fashioning the material – Clu Gallagher and assorted punks and New Wavers are pinned down in a funeral home by an army of the undead – to have something like the rambunctious party atmosphere in which kids with home video were now consuming horror movies on VHS, complete with a headbanging soundtrack featuring the likes of 45 Grave and The Cramps.

The movie also trotted out a new and improved model of zombie, sometimes exemplifying the finest analogue puppetry work you'll ever see – I especially love the spinal fluid pooling at the stump of the half-torso zombie who gets to explain the mob's modus operandi. Yes, these corpses were able to speak (mostly about brains, mind you), run at a dead sprint ages before 28 *Days Later*..., and absorb as many headshots as the Louisville police department could throw at them, if not the least-anguished-over A-bomb drop in film history. It all makes for utterly inessential viewing, and so much the better for it.

Disc: More extras than even the most ardent *Return* fan could need in several afterlives.

Lost and found

THE NICKEL RIDE

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Robert Mulligan's LA-set 1970s 'sunshine noir' is a melancholy, dreamlike portrait of an imperilled man on the fringes of the mob

By Andrew Male

"I can't explain why *The Nickel Ride* didn't do well," said Robert Mulligan in 1978. "It may have been too subtle. Also, it was a depression. It deals with how a man can be killed – and I don't mean physically killed – by the judgement of other people." Promoting his new film *Bloodbrothers* in the December issue of *Films & Filming*, Mulligan was also carrying some insider knowledge of his own on how a man might be killed by the judgement of others.

A Bronx-Irish former Marine, graduate of the 50s New York television industry alongside Arthur Penn, Sidney Lumet, Sidney Pollack and John Frankenheimer, Mulligan made his name in the 1960s directing a series of socially conscious Alan J. Pakula productions, most notably their 1962 adaptation of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Yet by 1978 Mulligan hadn't worked in four years, thanks in part to the failure of 1974's *The Nickel Ride*. The film premiered at Cannes but never received UK distribution and only landed in the US two years later, the second feature to Robert Aldrich's *Hustle*.

However, with a 2011 US DVD release, a cult following developed, boosted by IndieWire's December 2014 list of ten American crime films sharing DNA with *Inherent Vice*, Paul Thomas Anderson's abstruse sunshine noir. Appropriately, many of Mulligan's films possess a *Vice*-like grip, particularly 1965's *Inside Daisy Clover* and 1972's *The Other*: hallucinatory portraits of naive protagonists under assault from grim reality. *The Nickel Ride* is more interesting still; a trancelike study in the slow psychological destruction of a middle-aged man, dealing in the supposed certainties of that 'real' world: community, money and power.

Played with brooding forbearance by a suitably weary-looking Jason Miller (aged just 35, in only his second starring role after *The Exorcist*), Cooper is an ex-carny Barker operating as 'key man' for a handful of mob lock-ups in downtown LA; a white-suited Caesar to a neighbourhood empire of bar-flies, hustlers and bums.

Yet from the film's opening slow pan – from a digital clock showing 4:05am, past a near-empty pack of Lucky Strikes to a close-up of Cooper, wide awake, smoking – nothing remains certain in *The Nickel Ride* beyond the ticking clock and a man running out of Luckies. "That's the name of the game," a huckster pal tells Coop. "Your rabbit's foot, your shamrock... talismans all."

The film takes place on Coop's 40th birthday, but getting older is no celebration. Scored by Dave Grusin's abstract flute and guitar lullabies,



Darkness at noon: Bo Hopkins and Jason Miller in Robert Mulligan's *The Nickel Ride*

The mood is one of dreamlike unease. A 4am fug of insomnia and dread hangs over the entire film, amplified by a terse script

the mood is one of dreamlike unease. A 4am fug of insomnia and dread hangs over the entire film, amplified by a terse, elliptical script from future *Forrest Gump* screenwriter Eric Roth, where everyone but Coop and his girlfriend Sarah (played with a compelling vulnerability by the brilliant Linda Haynes) speaks in portentous gnomic aphorisms – "Yesterday don't count", "Friendships don't go strong no more" – that reek of doubt and betrayal.

Through these underworld whispers, and the jaded Southern (in)sincerity of mob go-between Carl (*Magnum PI*'s John Hillerman), we deduce that Coop, valued numbers man back in the day, is now losing control, as his

unseen bosses – 'The People' – wait for him to finalise a deal to transform a disused freight yard into a clearing zone for stolen goods. Or maybe not. Maybe this is all a sick mindgame, played by The People as they slowly edge Coop out. In *The Nickel Ride*, nothing is as it seems.

Carl introduces Coop to Turner, a "new boy out of Tulsa... they want us to take in for a while", yet it's never clear if this grinning Joe Buck with his ten-gallon hat, embroidered denims and cowboy boots is Coop's replacement, protégé, minder or killer. Played by Bo Hopkins like some cunning Aesop fox made flesh, Turner even eats an apple ambiguously.

This constant state of uncertainty is heightened by the paranoid gaze of Jordan Croneweth's camera. In March 1974's *American Cinematographer*, the future *Bladerunner* DP described *The Nickel Ride*'s shadowy look as "controlled soft light", natural light, blocked with window frames and doorways and tinted sepia in post-production. It's an 'unnatural' naturalism, further unmoored by Croneweth's prowling Panaflex, the ever-present threat of imminent violence in Coop's crumbling world.

Eventually, Coop's sleeplessness warps the film's fabric. A hotel appointment with mobbed-up cop Elias (played with sleazy élan by Bart Burns, 50s TV's Mike Hammer) becomes a Kafkaesque loop of miscommunication, while a climactic scene of Peckinpah-style violence is ultimately revealed as a dream, when a bloodied Coop walks in on his own sleeping self. When real violence comes, it is sweaty, blurred and ugly, punching through the frame's edges like the aberration of a tired mind.

The end is inevitable. In the film's melancholy final shot, Coop appears, finally, to be sleeping. In that inevitability lies *The Nickel Ride*'s tragedy, both in the Shakespearean sense and also in the sense of artistic failure. There is, finally, nothing to do but wait. You're watching how a man can be killed. It is inescapable. And that is a depression. ☹

With thanks to Andrew Nette and pulpcurry.com

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



THE NICKEL RIDE
JASON MILLER

'Although much of the narrative is unfathomable, the audience knows almost everything that's going to happen, since we're warned by a series of triumphant movie clichés... *The Nickel Ride*

is handsomely filmed in bleak pastels, but the numerous close-ups manage to stress the slowness of the action, and quick cuts can't dispel the tedium... one wonders if the director actually wanted to make a different picture. If only he had.'

Nora Sayre 'New York Times', 1975

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Official secrets: Eric Rohmer (left) with cinematographer Néstor Almendros, with whom he shot seven films

THE DOUBLE LIFE OF MAURICE

ERIC ROHMER: A BIOGRAPHY

By Antoine de Baecque and Noël Herpe,
Translated by Steven Rendall and Lisa Neal,
Columbia University Press, 608pp, £30,
ISBN 9780231175586

Reviewed by David Thompson

Eric Rohmer, elder statesman of the French New Wave and purest observer of a particularly French attitude to love, desire and frustration, was a man of secrets. Most famously, his adventures in the screen trade were conducted under a pseudonym. His real name was Maurice Schérer, and he remained faithful to his wife and two sons throughout his life, though they took no part in his filmmaking and only encountered his collaborators on his death bed. On page 127 of this extremely detailed book on the man, the authors write: "Maurice Schérer's family life has almost no interest for the biographer." And with that the family members virtually disappear from the narrative until the very end.

This might suggest that this is a book only

for those interested in a close analysis of a singular body of work. But the triumph of Antoine de Baecque (a former editor of *Cahiers du cinéma*, and author of an equally weighty tome on Godard) and Noël Herpe is to leave no stone unturned in their investigation into what was behind Rohmer's films, their context and the complex web of personalities and ideas that brought them to life.

Schérer was born in 1920 into a middle-class family in the French provinces. After graduating, he took a job as a teacher, failing to achieve a high academic post because of innate shyness that caused problems in oral exams, and only took an interest in films in his late twenties. What this book vividly reminds us of is the intense cinephilia that gripped Paris in the late 1940s and early 50s – a period in which film journals appeared and vanished at an astounding rate, a new generation crowded into the temple of Henri Langlois's Cinémathèque Française in Paris, and of course the New Wave was born, so that critics could avoid a protracted apprenticeship in filmmaking and simply plunge into directing their own scripts.

Rohmer was rather older than his fellow

travellers Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette and François Truffaut, and they all retained a deep respect towards him, even when ousting him from the editorship of *Cahiers* in 1963 (Truffaut went on to help produce some of Rohmer's films at a distance). While Schérer continued to teach classics full-time – the only job his mother thought he held, as he took pains to disguise his true vocation right up until her death in 1970 – Rohmer started to put more energy into his filmmaking.

As the authors reveal, Rohmer began directing short films from 1950, and even shot and edited a feature – now sadly lost – which was never distributed because of legal problems. His first full-length film shown in cinemas, *The Sign of Leo* (1961), was a commercial failure. Only with the 'Moral Tales' cycle did Rohmer position himself so that he could make low-budget films exactly as he wished under the auspices of a company he helped found, Les Films du Losange. *My Night at Maud's* (1969), *Claire's Knee* (1970) and *Love in the Afternoon* (1972) brought him international success and effectively made him a cinema 'brand'. The Gene Hackman character in *Night Moves* (1975) might have dismissed these films as "like watching paint

dry”, but there was a large audience hungry for witty, naturalistic dramas about (mostly middle-class and almost always white) French people trying to sort out their complicated love lives.

If the ‘Moral Tales’ were concerned with a man faced with the choice between two women to complete his life, then his subsequent series, ‘Comedies and Proverbs’, took a more female-centric viewpoint, suggesting that “it’s the girl who decides”. As Rohmer grew older, his casts remained as youthful as ever, and his continuing enthusiasm for probing the love lives of very young women might have raised a few more eyebrows today. In the late 1950s Chabrol painted a hilarious portrait of Rohmer awkwardly approaching young women in the park to act in one of his films. But once he was established, Rohmer would be joined in his office by a constant parade of potential writers and actresses, whose conversations and personal lives would feed into his scripts. Many became part of his repertory company and, in his later films, key members of the crew. When he was once asked, “How do you manage to have tea every day with these magnificent girls?” he replied, “My secret is absolute chastity.”

Early in this book we hear about Paul Gégau, an

When asked, ‘How do you manage to have tea every day with these magnificent girls?’ he replied, ‘My secret is chastity’

extrovert libertine who became Rohmer’s closest ally and who would contribute to the films of the New Wave. Gégau was, loosely, the yang to Rohmer’s yin, indulging in outrage (he liked donning Nazi uniforms) and arguably enacting the darker thoughts in the shy academic’s mind. Rohmer was a practising Catholic and seemingly averse to politics – he was untouched both by the Occupation and May ’68 – though he was often branded as a right-wing royalist. Rohmer’s brother, a successful academic, thought him a “ferociously independent anarchist”. Rohmer’s most overt statement of a position was in *The Tree, The Mayor and the Mediatheque* (1993), a superb satire on political pretension and the grandiose modern developments that were disfiguring rural France. It at least underlined his ecological concerns, the only cause for which he would offer any sign of support in public. Rohmer was also a firm anti-smoker, though to say – as the authors do – that his films don’t include this vice is to ignore the frequent lighting up in *My Night at Maud’s* (Jean-Louis Trintignant complained the director paid more attention to the ashtrays than his actors).

This book is to be treasured for the huge amount of research undertaken – and testimonial collected – by the authors. It sometimes follows the philosophical bent of its subject too far (plots are barely explained, almost taken for granted), and the translation can be infelicitous. But it gives us significant insights into the working methods of a great filmmaker, who in his deceptive simplicity has proved largely inimitable. ⑤

THE PARISIAN AVANT-GARDE IN THE AGE OF CINEMA 1900-1923

By Jennifer Wild, University of California Press, 360pp, £24.95. ISBN 9780520279896

Reviewed by Nick James

The main aim of this fascinating, ambitious, exhaustively researched study – Academic with a capital A – is to take a new approach to studying the effect of cinema on two generations of avant-garde artists working in the years before avant-garde cinema made a name for itself. In language that’s carefully wrought, though inevitably prone to the fashions and obscurities of post-structuralist jargon, Wild displays her impressive grasp of the scholarship of her period and of its key players and her considerable imaginative powers in reconstructing how cinema may have been experienced and responded to by the likes of Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia and Tristan Tzara in those first frantic years of the 20th century, when film had not yet been tamed to a dominant industrial pattern.

In deciding what she means by cinema, Wild rejects what she calls ‘cinematic verticality’, a conception of cinema that depends on the common way film has been projected since the theatrical feature film became the professional standard for exhibitors – ie, the reflective method, in which the projector and audience face the same direction, the latter passively looking at the screen and losing themselves in it, a method based on Renaissance ideas of perspective and focus. Concerned to remind us that the ‘vertical’ model was not yet dominant in her period, Wild instead privileges ‘cinematic horizontality’, a “different symbolic form”, one that she is at great pains to explain.

One inspiration for Wild’s ‘horizontal’ conception was the approach taken to cave paintings in the 1960s by the archaeologist André Leroi-Gourhan, who saw the cave itself

as a text, “a system of relations” between the image and its means of display. Put loosely, horizontality in the context of early 20th-century cinema means the inclusion of all aspects of the medium that had an impact – alternative methods and locales of projection (for instance, the ‘transparent’ method popular at the time, by which films could be shown in restaurants and other less transfixing spaces), the eruption into public spaces of startlingly vivid film posters, the impact of movie stardom through the explosion of fan magazines, etc.

The approach builds out from Tom Gunning’s influential concept of the ‘cinema of attractions’ and eventually proposes a new term, the ‘cinema of ballistics’, to describe the later moment when a cinema of the instant – serials like Louis Feuillade’s *Fantômas* (1913), the slapstick stardom of Charlot (Charlie Chaplin) and US crime films – undermined the French national wartime effort to make cinema a respectable, dialogue-based middle-class entity in imitation of the theatre.

It is this moment that Wild identifies as creating a schism between the original avant-gardists, such as Apollinaire and Picabia, who had felt the first impact of cinema as a phenomenon, and what she calls, borrowing from Robert Desnos, the ‘generation of 1900’ – in particular Tzara and the other Dadaists – who saw in the ‘cinema of ballistics’ a timely victory of the image over the word.

A range of art practice gets discussed, beginning with Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* (1907), which draws its sense of space, Wild argues, from the forward vector of camera movements; she goes on to make a link between Picasso’s cubist paintings and the ‘transparent projection’ method. Francis Picabia’s mechanical portraits and Marcel Duchamp’s *The Large Glass* are discussed as works arising out of cinema’s exponential expansion into other cultural media. Artists using these sources are part of a general move away from nature to culture as the provider of subject matter. Later, Tzara and co staged public interventions and got attention by drawing upon the publicity methods of cinema. And by then cinema was ready for its own avant garde.

Happy in the middle ground between phenomenology and structuralism where ‘lived experience’ apparently reigns as the key critical concept, Wild’s enthusiasms are for “fundamentally active” relations between subject and culture. I could wish that *The Parisian Avant-Garde* more actively tried to engage with the non-academic reader, because it has ideas that may be useful in this equally hard-to-capture time, which in terms of culture shock is not dissimilar to the period she describes. She does somewhat labour ‘cinematic horizontality’, as if the concept might vanish at any moment. But though thinking in terms of horizontality is an oblique strategy, one by implication anti-patriarchal and anti-canonical, dependent on long strings of tentative connections, this densely argued text none the less nails it, teasing out and describing the fragmentary subtleties of influence extant in art and across culture in the dawning decades of post-attraction cinema. It’s a work of great intellectual fortitude. ⑤



Poster for Louis Feuillade’s 1913 serial *Fantômas*

THE DAY THE MUSIC DIED

A Life Lived Behind the Lens

By Tony Garnett, Constable, 320pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781472122735

Reviewed by Mark Duguid

"I have spent my life seeking the truth," says Tony Garnett early in *The Day the Music Died*. That dogged quest defined a remarkable career as perhaps Britain's most single-minded, politically radical and combative producer of television and film. And it defines his always compelling autobiography too. For, as Garnett reveals, it marks the final leg of an intensely gruelling lifelong journey to overcome tragedy.

It's Garnett's matchless CV as innovator, agitator and one of TV's most incisive critics that will draw most people to this book. He doesn't disappoint. He offers telling insights on his triumphs: *Wednesday Play* classics *Up the Junction* and *Cathy Come Home* and his long, fertile partnership with Ken Loach (he's fascinating on the travails of *Kes*), as well as his 90s indie venture World Productions, which reinvented series drama with *Between the Lines*, *The Cops* and *This Life*.

He is candid on his limits as actor and director, droll and perceptive on his sometimes bizarre 80s Hollywood sabbatical (which earned him unlikely credits on *Earth Girls Are Easy* and *Sesame Street* spin-off *Follow That Bird*). And he can be brutally self-critical (on *Cathy Come Home*: "What we made was a liberal, handwringing piece with no radical solution").

His pen-portraits of contemporaries are sometimes warm, sometimes waspish, often surprising (he's more generous to Mary Whitehouse than to Dennis Potter), and there's plenty of acute analysis of the BBC's strengths and weaknesses. But after a career devoted to storytelling at its rawest, it turns out that he's been holding back his most urgent and absorbing story: his own.

Early chapters vividly describe his extended working-class Birmingham family, presided over by formidable matriarch Grandma. Dad, a mechanic, is "energetic, charming and amusing", but also a brutal and arbitrary disciplinarian. Tony idolises him, and adores Mom: "Loving, meek and a peacemaker." But just before Christmas 1941 tragedy strikes, hard. He wakes one night to find Mom convulsed in agony. She dies that night, of multiple organ failure following a botched back-street abortion. The police get involved. Three weeks later, Dad kills himself. Aged five, Tony is sent to live with Auntie Pom and Uncle Harold. In shame, the family suppress discussion of the tragedy. Tony shuts down emotionally. The music has died.

Life with his adoptive parents is uneasy. They are well-meaning but stern, and suspicious of his gift of the gab. He begins a lifetime of rebellion, embracing socialism and atheism, risking expulsion for a sixth-form protest, embarrassing his family with a tirade against hypocrisy in his local church. His lust for argument leads him briefly to switch allegiance to the Tories and, worse, Birmingham City.

But love rescues him. In his late teens, he meets beautiful, effervescent Topsy Jane Legge. They move to London, live in sin (to both families' horror) and embark on joint acting careers. Working-class accents are fashionable, but he



A bird in the hand: David Bradley, as Billy, with Tony Garnett on the set of Ken Loach's *Kes*

loses the best roles to Alan Bates, Tom Courtenay or Albert Finney. Topsy, though, shines. John Schlesinger casts her in *Billy Liar* (1963). Then something snaps; a light goes out. She undergoes ECT, is diagnosed with schizophrenia simplex ("a dustbin diagnosis... she was a psychiatric mystery"). Schlesinger replaces her with Julie Christie. Topsy is changed utterly and they eventually split, leaving their son with her parents. Garnett suffers deep depression, on top of an already chronic back condition.

Realising he doesn't have Topsy's 'magic', he abandons acting and turns to production, just as BBC drama head Sydney Newman is setting up *The Wednesday Play*. Garnett helps shape the strand as a 'National Theatre of the Air', selecting and producing the most urgent and challenging contemporary work. His first encounter with Loach is inauspicious: "He made no impression." But they discover a shared vision of television and drama: "We loved TV as a way of reaching millions... creating an event." They are soon joined at the hip, fighting their crusades together on increasingly radical projects until the late 70s, but Garnett still finds time to nurture such iconoclastic talents as Mike Leigh, Jim Allen and G.F. Newman.

The tragic revelations illuminate specific career choices: his pugilistic defence of *Up the Junction*'s harrowing abortion scene; the radical anti-psychiatry of *In Two Minds* (1967) and the feature *Family Life* (1971). But they also explain his astonishing work rate and drive. He "worked, or invented work, seven days a week, from early morning until well into the evening", to ward off introspection.

His combative streak sometimes lands him in trouble. As an actor in Sidney J. Furie's *The Boys* (1962), he baits Richard Todd ("a real reactionary") and has to be rescued by a kindly

Robert Morley. But it serves him well in his battles at the Beeb. He defends Dennis Potter's two 1965 Nigel Barton plays from panicky managers, and learns to conceal provocative projects from execs until the last minute. But his greatest battles are over form, not content: for the right to take handheld 16mm film cameras on to the streets and borrow documentary tropes. He makes enemies: moral campaigner Mary Whitehouse, inevitably, but also Grace Wyndham Goldie, the formidable head of current affairs, who fears *Cathy Come Home* heralds "a new and dangerous trend in television drama". Garnett counters, witheringly: "The most accomplished fiction on the BBC [is] the Nine O'Clock News."

Among the book's most appealing features are its frequent, often wryly self-deprecating family anecdotes. His acting career bemuses Harold and Pom, until he's cast alongside Jack Warner on *Dixon of Dock Green*; after witnessing the filming of *Kes*, "all they spoke of was the work of the caterers". One auntie is disappointed that he can't fix her broken telly: "I thought you said you worked at the BBC?"

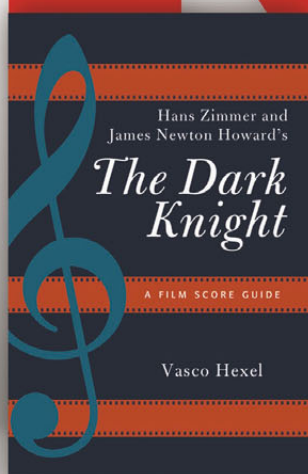
Perhaps unsurprisingly, family thinking colours much of his professional life. The inestimable Sydney Newman "was tough, volatile and his anger made men quail. He was like my Dad." He imagines a BBC divided into 'parents' (managers) and 'adolescents' (creators), indulged or controlled according to fashion. Years later, he has to remind his youthful team on *This Life*, "I'm not your father."

His 90s transformation from "enfant terrible to... eminence grise" coincides with a long-deferred self-healing. After years of punishing sessions in the consulting room, Garnett finally lays his demons to rest. The book makes a far better advert for psychotherapy than for a career in TV.

Yet anyone with more than a passing interest in British TV's history over the past half-century will need to read this book; Garnett is a wise and insightful teacher. But they'll be rewarded too with an extraordinary human story, capped, thankfully, with something he rarely allowed his dramas: an emotionally uplifting resolution.

He wakes to find Mom in agony. She dies that night, following a botched abortion. Three weeks later, Dad kills himself

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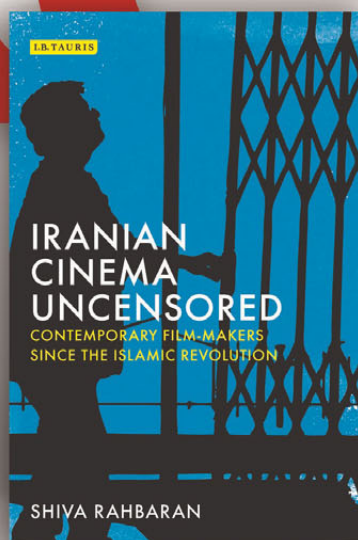
HANS ZIMMER AND JAMES NEWTON HOWARD'S THE DARK KNIGHT

A Film Score Guide

By Vasco Hexel, Rowman & Littlefield, 234pp, paperback, £32.95, ISBN 9781442266728

One of the highlights of *The Dark Knight* was its rich score, created by two of Hollywood's leading composers, Oscar winner Hans Zimmer and multiple Oscar nominee James Newton Howard. Drawing on unprecedented access to some of the key creators of the film, this volume offers a unique insight into the score and its creation. Vasco Hexel, whose work has been featured on ABC Television, the BBC and the Discovery Channel, leads the masters programme in composition for screen at the Royal College of Music, London, and is visiting lecturer at the Faculty of Music, University of Cambridge. This book will be of interest to cinema and music scholars, as well as fans of both composers.

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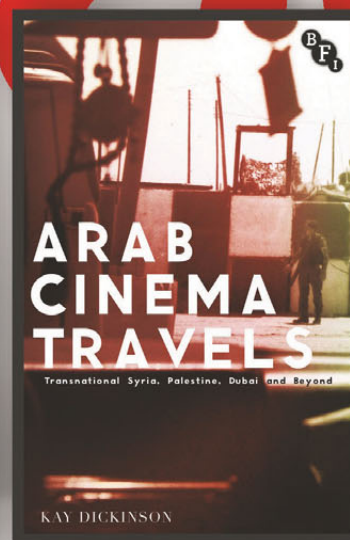
IRANIAN CINEMA UNCENSORED

Contemporary Film-makers since the Islamic Revolution

Shiva Rahbaran, translated by Maryam Mohajer & Shiva Rahbaran, I.B. Tauris, 336 pp, paperback, £17.99, ISBN 9781784534189

Containing 12 first-hand interviews with renowned filmmakers living and working in contemporary Iran, this book provides insights into filmmaking within a society often at odds with its rulers. Reflecting upon the 1979 revolution and its influence on their work, as well as the effect of their films on Iranian audiences, filmmakers such as Abbas Kiarostami highlight key issues in Iranian cinema's reception in the West and its role in the development of Iran's global image. Through these conversations Shiva Rahbaran shows that the seeds of New Iranian Cinema were sown long before the revolution, and how Iranian filmmakers created a cinema which became a global phenomenon despite censorship, sanctions and political isolation.

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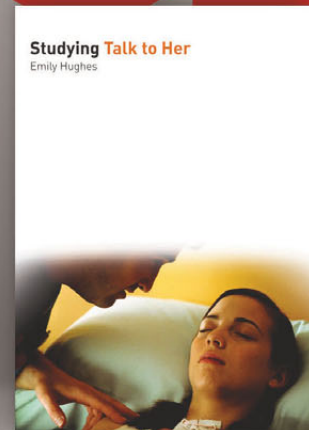
ARAB CINEMA TRAVELS

Transnational Syria, Palestine, Dubai and Beyond

By Kay Dickinson, Palgrave/BFI, 232pp, paperback, £21.99, ISBN 9781844577842

More than simply a survey of film across the Arab region, *Arab Cinema Travels* offers a fascinating and expansive examination of Arab film culture in wider historical and geopolitical contexts. It explores the impacts of travel and mobility on Arab cinema – migration and expulsion, pilgrimage and tourism. Starting with the inventive traditions of Arabic travelogues, the text traces the manifold paths that converge in the cinemas of Syria, Palestine and Dubai – how Syrian film production is influenced by a long tradition of studying abroad, Palestinian movies react to international assumptions about the Holy Land, and Dubai's fledgling industry draws on centuries' worth of trade-route management, logistics expertise and labour migration.

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STUDYING 'TALK TO HER'

By Emily Hughes, Auteur, 146pp, paperback, illustrated, £9.99, ISBN 9781906733438

Emily Hughes provides an in-depth analysis of both the formal elements of Pedro Almodóvar's hugely rich 2002 film and the themes and issues that arise from it, including: the social context of modern Spain against the traditional iconography; shifting attitudes towards gender; and, crucially, the uneasy, morally ambiguous depiction of rape and the spectator's reaction to it. Designed to be accessible to students both of film and of Spanish, *Studying 'Talk to Her'* is the essential guide to a milestone in Spanish cinema of the 21st century.

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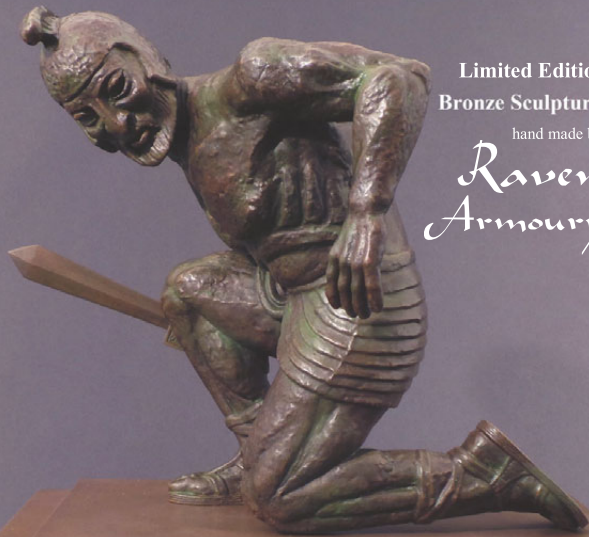
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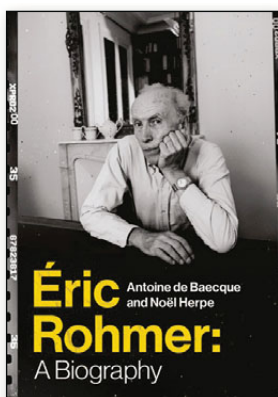
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Éric Rohmer

A Biography

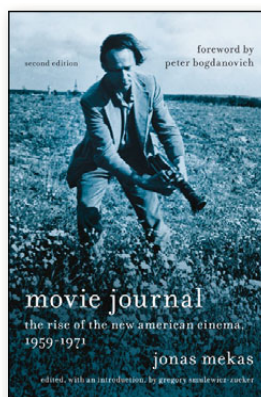
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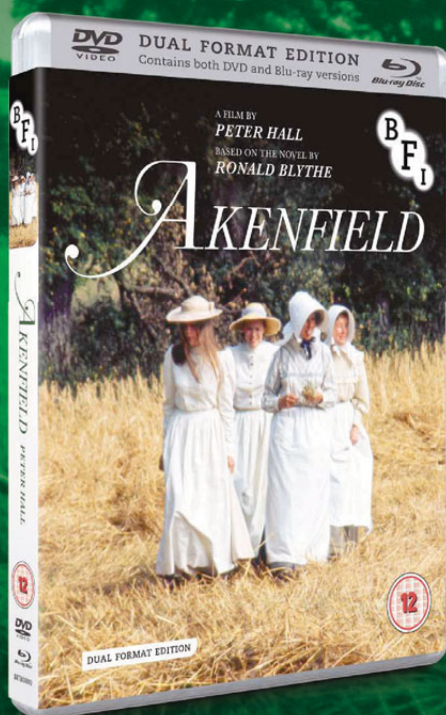
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EXHIBITION COMPLEX

We welcomed the debate around film exhibition in the most recent issue ('Ways of seeing', S&S, August). As ever, it's important to head off the 'reports of our death' that independent cinemas are routinely subjected to. Attendance at venues in our network has grown ten per cent in the last decade; 100 new cinema sites (or organisations showing independent films) were added to our database in the financial year 2015-16.

Cinema remains the premier place to watch films, a fact that is only thrown into starker relief when competition for eyeballs and free time increases. Our challenge is to make that experience as approachable as possible for as broad an audience as possible, while ensuring that the material we show remains challenging and stimulating. There's an inconsistency in suggesting that release schedules are getting ever more overcrowded while programming is becoming more homogenous. Within our 20-cinema network, diversity of programming has only increased: in the 2015-16 financial year, our sites played 3,842 different titles. Certainly, parts of the independent cinema scene are squeezing foreign-language programming in pursuit of 'reliable' studio product, but what current statistics fail to account for are the breadth of venues showing films off-date to enthusiastic and growing audiences. New cinema openings, the growth of the community cinema sector and the diversification of cinema's activity: this is what we receive most enquiries for and cater most to.

We have been distributing cultural cinema for more than 10 years, and in that time the average number of venues screening an ICO title has increased by 400 per cent, from 20 to 100. Our most recent releases (*Power in Our Hands*, a documentary on the deaf community's fight for civil rights; a rerelease of Kurosawa's *Ran*; and the children's animation *The Big Knights*) each played to more than 90 sites and expanded audiences' sense of the possibilities of cinema. Technology means exhibition is more sustainable than ever (notwithstanding the dreaded virtual print fee, which has proved a burden to cinemas desiring to show more challenging films); so, as ever, it's a question of continuing to develop the audience for nourishing film experiences in the place where they can truly make an impact: the cinema.

Catharine Des Forges Director,
Independent Cinema Office

CALL OF DUTY

While I cannot be alone in eagerly looking forward to the freewheeling style of Nick Pinkerton in the Reviews section every month, his admission that he has not seen *Now You See Me* in a review of its sequel *Now You See Me 2* (S&S, August) strays into dereliction of critical duty. He brazenly admits to being 'ill equipped' to review this mercenary franchise expansion but defends the gap in his authority with some guff about 'thinking of movies as freestanding units'. I admire his honesty but

LETTER OF THE MONTH DOOM WATCH



I would like to offer a minor corrective in response to the doom-and-gloom assertion in last month's issue of a "full-blown slump in foreign-language cinema in the UK" ('Ways of seeing', S&S, August).

Many directors now move quickly from making films in their first language to working in English. Importantly, such films are not made with American money but are European co-productions, bringing in filmmaking talent from around the world. They include Thomas Vinterberg's *Far from the Madding Crowd* (which made £6.1 million at the UK box office), Yorgos Lanthimos's *The Lobster* (£1.5 million), Paolo Sorrentino's *Youth* (£1 million) and Luca Guadagnino's *A Bigger Splash* (£1.1 million, pictured above). Interestingly, Sorrentino and Guadagnino saw very little box-office uptick in moving to English from Italian. Worth noting too that both the BBC and/or Film4 played important roles in funding all these films.

The mystery of where those big 'crossover' foreign-language films have gone is, for me, solved by this transformation. The question we should ask is: what artistically is lost in

the move to English? I'll leave readers to compare the merits of those films and the comparable top four from 2005: *Downfall*, *A Very Long Engagement*, *Kung Fu Hustle*, *The Chorus*. Certainly, I would argue, we shouldn't make the reading of subtitles a marker of our cinematic health.

Beyond these crossover titles there is much to cheer in the recent success of directors who do continue to direct in their native language. Renowned directors who've recently had their biggest ever UK box-office results include Abderrahmane Sissako, Roy Andersson, Koreeda Hirokazu, Abdellatif Kechiche and the Dardenne brothers.

The challenge is how to attract audiences to films that confront them with difficult and inconvenient subjects. How do we get people to see the well-reviewed *Chronic*, starring Tim Roth, given that it deals with palliative care? Or how to get people to see the acclaimed *The Tribe* – a film, it's worth pointing out, that for those outside the deaf community offers no language at all.

Jake Garriock Curzon/Artificial Eye, London

not, in this case, his practice. Any useful critique of a sequel must surely take into account its predecessor. If a potential customer wants to know anything about this film, it's whether it's better, the same or worse than the original. As it is, we learn that new director Jon Chu "would seem to be an improvement" on Louis Leterrier. Well, that's going straight on the poster.

Andrew Collins by email

DEMON EYES

The Neon Demon may have had a largely female production team ('The beauty myth', S&S, July), but it also has a relentless (and exhausting) male gaze. In its conservative politics, from predatory lesbians to fetishising career women as unknowable creatures, it's less Jodorowsky than Just 'Emmanuelle' Jaeckin. In this sense, the film's most predatory character is the director.

Christopher Fowler London

A SUITABLE CASE FOR TREATMENT

I just bought your great July issue and loved the story on Olivia de Havilland ('Steel and silk', S&S). The article by Olaf Möller ('Peace initiative', Wide Angle) on the first post-war Cannes Film Festival was interesting too, but how could he have left out Michèle Morgan winning Best Actress for *La Symphonie Pastorale*? This was her first film after returning to France from America, where she sat out the war. Morgan – who at 95 is still alive and well in France – was exquisite in the film.

Michael Mccrann by email

Additions and corrections

August p.40 The final box-office gross for *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* was in fact £568,423; the film should have been eighth rather than ninth in our list of the top 10 foreign-language films in the UK/Ireland in 2005; p.66 *A Poem Is a Naked Person*, Certificate 15, 90m 38; p.73 *Born to Be Blue*, Certificate 15, 97m 30s; p.73 *Brahman Naman*, Not submitted for theatrical classification, VoD certificate: 18, 95m 55s; p.74 *The Carer*, Certificate 15, 88m 29s; p.82 *K-Shop*, Certificate 18, 120m 13s; p.89 *The Secret Life of Pets*, Running time (90m 44s) includes short film 'Mower Minions' (4m 43s)

PLANET OF THE APES



The sight of Charlton Heston sunk to his knees before a maimed Statue of Liberty has become a defining image of apocalypse

By David Cairns

Parodies may mock, but they also tacitly acknowledge the iconic status of their targets, so the recent post-Brexit pic of a leaning Big Ben jutting from the sands of a lonely beach affirms the ending of *Planet of the Apes* (1968) as a defining image of the imminent apocalypse.

The Statue of Liberty is such an imposing and unambiguous figure, it makes sense that so many of its movie appearances are ironic, from Chaplin's critical glance as he's corralled by immigration men in *The Immigrant* (1917), to a similar moment in *The Godfather: Part II* (1974).

Pierre Boulle's 1963 novel *Monkey Planet* was adapted by, among others, Rod Serling, and the twist end that works as both narrative rug-pull and intellectual mindfuck echoes Serling's approach in the series he created, *The Twilight Zone*. So many genre films since have tried to wed an action-movie drive to some kind of surprise paradigm-shift denouement that it's easy to forget that the grafting of the short-story reversal on to a studio blockbuster was unique at the time.

It's an image that had been kicking around pulp sci-fi art for years, but found the perfect home in a movie in search of a punchline to convince not-very-perceptive astronaut Charlton Heston that he's been home all along. The fact that the apes speak English didn't cause him to tumble to this obvious fact (in the novel,

they have their own language); the talking doll found in a cave ("They really built these things," as Woody Allen remarks when a fossilised Volkswagen starts first time in *Sleeper*, 1973), which proves humans used to talk, hasn't led him to ask the next question. A monumental, copper-bottomed ham like Charlton Heston is going to need a monumental, copper-plated signpost to point him to the correct conclusion.

Heston is accompanied, like any good western hero, by his horse and his rifle, and also the lovely Nova (Linda Harrison), a shapely mute in a rag bikini (the word itself has atomic age origins) recalling Raquel Welch's voluptuous cavegirl of two years (or one million) before Charlton. Sexy, pliant, non-verbal, she fulfils dubious male fantasies and illustrates Hollywood's dictum that Armageddon must have a little sex in it (see also Dr. Strangelove's carnal vision of mutually assured destruction: a big mineshaft full of pneumatic secretaries).

Director Franklin J. Schaffner handles the scene with muscular dexterity. Tilting from glaring blue sky and glittering sea, he follows the riders until a decrepit structure looms in the foreground. He knows we won't identify it yet, because it's a rather unusual thing: a sculpted flame surrounded by mangled and corroded guard rails. Then we get a view between the points of the statue's odd BDSM crown of spikes.

The final image has undeniable grandeur – the calm susurrations of the ocean complements the blank gaze of the inert statue

Heston recognises Lady Liberty before we get a clear glimpse: movie magic allows him to trot right up to it before reacting. Then he sinks to his knees, pounds the surf, and does the kind of epic he-man emoting he gets the big bucks for: as an elegy for the human race, one might wish for something more poetic, but in this very scene the movie is making clear we're getting what we deserve. "You maniacs! You blew it up! God damn you! God damn you all to hell!"

Schaffner's neatest grace note is to bracket this monologue, delivered into the indifferent spume of a Malibu beach, within two shots of Nova looking on with blank concern. Like a dog witnessing a family row, she knows something serious is afoot but has no frame of reference for it. Then she looks up, understanding that her weird, neurotic companion's tantrum has something to do with the structure before her.

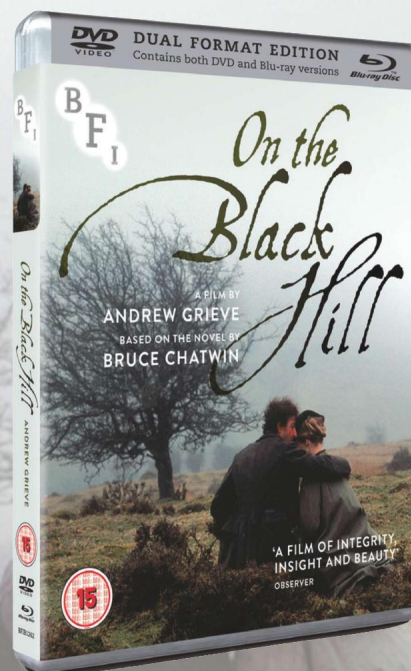
And only now does Schaffner let us see, as if through the eyes of the innocent Nova. The zoom out from the now tiny humans to the full panorama is a bit clunky: blame the limits imposed on camera movement by glass paintings. But the final image has undeniable grandeur, and the calm susurrations of the ocean perfectly complements the blank, eyeless gaze of the inert statue. Buried to her waist in the sand like a Samuel Beckett heroine, she has been tilted back slightly by New York's detonation, so that her impassive metal face now stares heavenward, in the direction Heston came from and now perhaps would wish to return. She's an inverse Ozymandias, all upper storeys instead of trunkless legs, but her significance is identical to the remains immortalised by Shelley: "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" 📌



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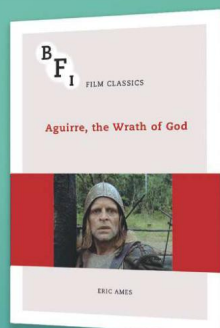


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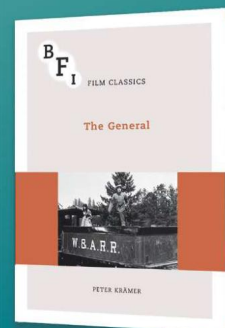
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